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THE HAUNTED INN

A Drama in Four Acts

By

PERETZ HIRSHBEIN

Authorized Translation from the Yiddish

By ISAAC GOLDBERG

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FOREWORD

It was with "The Haunted Inn" (*Die Puste Kretshme*) that the Jewish Art Theatre of New York, under the direction of Mr. Emanuel Reicher, inaugurated its career in the autumn of 1919; by virtue of the striking production and the remarkable acting of Mr. J. Ben-Ami in the role of Itsik, the drama was soon the talk not only of the Yiddish reviewers, but also of the critics of the English press, who forsook Broadway for Madison Avenue and Twenty-Seventh Street and long made the play the subject of enthusiastic comment. It is this play, indeed, that was directly responsible for Mr. Ben-Ami's rapid transfer to the English-speaking stage, and his appearance in the English version will reveal one of the most original pieces in the Jewish repertory.

So much of the drama is written with Mr. Hirshbein's sensitivity to subdued tones that not a little of its quality is sure to be missed if the spectator or reader is not on the alert for the subtle values inherent in the better writings of the symbolists; here color tends to subside into nuance, and action, rarely of the violent category which we usually associate with melodrama, is refined into the suggestion of impulse and mood. Thus at first blush the opening act seems to the reader a calm procession

of rustic types, yet every event and mood of the play is introduced and forecast with an artistry that hides itself until it becomes part and parcel of the very life it chronicles. The arbitrary choice of Meta's future husband by the parents on both sides; the previous understanding between the girl and Itsik; the motif of the abandoned inn and the unmentionable spirits supposedly inhabiting it; the rebellion of the daughter as foreshadowed by the closing scene, in which she waves her hand to Itsik in the darkness; the entirely natural chatter of the grandfather intent upon the barn and its calves, in which are seen to be symbolized the home and the girl's eagerness for escape into a life of her own,—in these we have the play in little, of which all that follows is the logical unfolding.

One thing in particular should be dwelt upon as illustrating the subtlety of Hirshbein's technique. Throughout the play the mystical and supernatural mood is upon us, even as upon the dwellers in the hamlet of the action. Yet in no instance does the playwright summon the cheap aid of arbitrary forces; nowhere does he introduce any element not inherent in the very existence of his characters. To them their superstitions are part of their every thought and act, not, as with our more sophisticated selves, an amusing and instructive detail of psychological study. The spirits of the inn are real; they may be offended, they may pursue their victims, they must be propitiated. Hirshbein here achieves an effect of other-worldliness, of unreality, without

once employing any means other than those of quotidian reality. I have mentioned the spirits of the inn; take now the merchants of the unforgettable wedding scene in the second act. Nothing more natural than that a party of men should pause on their way to join the festivities, providing not only the music but handsome gifts for the couple, and then pass on. Yet to the relatives and guests assembled, in whose minds the inn is closely linked to the dowry, and in whom stirs the uneasiness of having disturbed the evil ones in their nest, the strangers, because of their very strangeness, may easily become ambassadors of those spirits. Add to this the kidnapping of the bride, and how can they doubt any longer that malignant influences are at work?

The abandoned inn becomes a symbol of parental restraint and in the end it is the symbol itself which overpowers the will both of the daughter and the father, each seeking an escape from the obsessions of the symbol. The play, however, is not exclusively symbolic, it has its moments of realism and romanticism and is, as a whole, distinguished for its subtly managed atmosphere of mystery; there is little if any attempt to portray character development in the progress of the play; the curtain falls on characters unchanged, their varying moods have passed in review, mood foreshadowing mood much as events foreshadow and interpret events.

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

BENDET, *a provincial horse-dealer.*

KHYENNE, *his wife.*

META, *their daughter.*

SHAKHNE, *Bendet's father.*

ITSIK, *his brother's son.*

TSIPKE, *Itsik's sister.*

EISIK, *an inn-keeper, one of Bendet's neighbors.*

LEIBUSH, *Eisik's son.*

*Neighboring Country Folk, Guests, Merchants,
Strangers, Musicians.*

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ACT ONE

SCENE: *At Bendet's, to the right, a large, straw-covered farmhouse with a few steps leading to the door. From the house, toward the left, extends a spacious barn, barred by a gate. When the barn door is opened horses may be seen. In the background a fence, with trees near by. In the distance, meadows. To the left, a sandy road bordered with trees; on the road, a well and a trough for the animals. Before the house a turf-mound. Evening. From time to time, wafted from the distance, sounds of birds chirping, cows mooing, ducks quacking.*

SHAKHNE.

[Wearing white linen trousers and boots; above, a large four-cornered garment with long fringes. On his head, a skull-cap. He appears in the doorway of the house, tugging at a calf's ears. The calf tears loose and dashes back into the house. Shakhne, who is very old, stands at a loss. He addresses the calf.]

You've drunk enough. Back into the barn now. Tsipke, my clever little grandchild, help your grandfather drive this calf into the barn. Auntie will

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soon come and scold because we took it into the house. And Meta will be coming. Tsipke! Tsipke!

TSIPKE.

[*A brunette with curly hair. She comes running out of the barn, barefoot.*]

I'll beat it with a rod, while you, grandpa, lead it by the ears, like this, like this.

SHAKHNE.

Hip, hop! That's the way. Oh, but we'll have a fine engagement party. Hip, hop! That's the way.

TSIPKE.

Why should the poor little calf suffer if Meta is to be betrothed?

SHAKHNE.

Hip, hop! Into the barn with you! [*He drives the calf into the barn.*]

TSIPKE.

Grandpa, why don't you ever ride over to us? Are you afraid you wouldn't have a good time?

SHAKHNE.

Oh, I'll visit you folks too. Your father Pinye is a son of mine, and so is your Uncle Bendet.

TSIPKE.

Then why don't you ever come to us?

SHAKHNE.

It's hard to gather a quorum for prayers on Saturday at your place. And I guess your father could pray without one, too. But I'll come; I'll come. With God's will, after Meta's wedding. When you become engaged, in God's good time, at your betrothal.

TSIPKE.

[Bursts out laughing.]

SHAKHNE.

What are you laughing about, my little calf! How far is it from fifteen to sixteen?

TSIPKE.

Why I'm only fourteen in all.

SHAKHNE.

And how far is it from fourteen to sixteen? That's when grandpa will come. He'll dress up in his Sabbath clothes and dance with a bottle on his head. *[Tsipke runs into the house.]* Where are you going, Tsipke?

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TSIPKE.

[Returns with a bottle in her hands.]

There, now! Let's see how you'll dance with the bottle on your head.

SHAKHNE.

You're a silly little calf. People don't dance with such a one. The bottle must be full of the best wine. And round grandpa must stand the bride and bridegroom and all the relatives in a circle, holding hands, all dressed in their best. That's when the bottle will stand on grandpa's head; that's when he'll dance! Hee, hee! This is the bottle that the calf drank from, you little goose.

TSIPKE

And will you dance at Meta's wedding?

SHAKHNE.

Maybe. God knows when her marriage will take place. Uncle is obstinate, and I don't like that at all. *[From afar comes the shrill, twice-repeated whistle of a bird.]* Too bad. We'll have rain again tomorrow.

TSIPKE.

How do you know?

SHAKHNE.

Can't you hear how he's whistling? That means rain. [*The calf bleats in the barn. To the calf.*] What do you want there? I won't let you out on the grass! You shouldn't have been so late. You should have had sense enough to be born before Purim, not a long time after Passover. If you hadn't been born so late, you'd be gambolling over the meadows now with your ma. Why were you so late? Hee, hee! See, Tsipke! It has stopped crying. Hee, hee. It heeds what I say, it understands. Gather up some dry sticks behind the house, my child. Auntie will come and make a fire, and cook supper. [*From the left, behind the house, is heard the neighing of horses.*]

TSIPKE.

Here comes Uncle! [*Runs to the road.*]

SHAKHNE.

Alone?

TSIPKE.

Eisik has come along with him.

BENDET.

[*A well-built farmer, dressed in a long coat girdled with a rope, enters with Eisik.*]

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EISIK

[A blond farmer, somewhat round-shouldered.]

BENDET.

Nobody home but you folks?

TSIPKE.

Grandpa and I.

EISIK.

This, I suppose, is your brother Pinye's daughter?

BENDET.

Tsipke, why didn't you go to the village with Auntie?

TSIPKE.

No special reason. I simply wished to stay behind with grandpa.

SHAKHNE.

Why have you left the horse standing in the road? Have him unharnessed.

BENDET.

The devil won't take him. See, Tsipke. There's grass in the coach-box. Give him some.

TSIPKE.

[Goes over to the road.]

SHAKHNE.

Unharness him.

EISIK.

We have somewhere else to go to later, Bendet! Ask the old man and let's hear what he has to say about it.

BENDET

He'll certainly be against it. We'll have a hard time with the old lady, too! Dad! I want to ask you a question.

SHAKHNE.

Hee, hee! Coming to father for advice? Bah! There must be something behind this.

EISIK.

Reb Shakhne, will you have a pinch of my snuff?
[Offers Shakhne his snuff-box.]

SHAKHNE.

[Takes a pinch of snuff and exhales with delight.]

Now there's excellent stuff for you! Did you

grind it yourself? You probably have an excellent stone. This is fine. Take a sniff, Bendet. I never can grind it down so fine.

BENDET.

And now, pa, listen closely to what I say.

[Meta and Tsipke come bounding in from the road with noisy laughter.]

META.

[On her shoulder she is carrying grass, bound with cloth. She catches sight of Eisik and her face falls. She casts an angry glance at him, which Bendet notices.]

BENDET.

Where's mother?

META.

She's on the way home.

TSIPKE.

I'll run to meet her. *[Exit.]*

BENDET.

[To Meta.]

Take the grass into the barn.

META.

[*Does so.*]

SHAKUNE.

Don't let the little calf escape. [*Approaches the barn.*]

EISIK.

She's a proud creature.

BENDET.

My daughter, after all. Just as you see her. The very earth trembles under her step.

EISIK.

That's the kind I need.

BENDET.

Between ourselves, she's a little too good for you. Sometimes it happens that the cow refuses to leave the barn. Yes, indeed. However — . Ah, here comes my old woman. You'll stay with us for supper. We'll talk the whole thing over together. Then you can ride home with full knowledge as to how the matter stands.

KHYENNE.

[*Enters.*]

TSIPKE.

*Comes in after her, carrying a bundle of hay tied
in a piece of cloth.]*

KHYENNE.

Ah, here's Reb Eisik. A guest, a welcome guest.
And what's the news over at your place?

EISIK.

Everything is first rate.

KHYENNE.

I'll go inside and start a fire. I suppose you'll
stay with us for supper, Reb Eisik? [*Goes into the
house.*]

BENDET.

Of course he'll stay.

EISIK.

As you say, then. [*They sit down upon the turf-
mound.*]

BENDET.

You understand, then, that it's one thing to *say*
what you please, and another thing to do as you
please.

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EISIK.

Just what are you referring to?

BENDET.

To this vacant inn and to my only daughter.
After all, it isn't as if we were dealing with a horse.

META.

[*Enters.*]

I want to keep the little calf and bring it up.

BENDET.

Carry this hay into the barn. Mother brought it.

META.

It's nice to sit on this hay. [*She sits down on it.*]

SHAKHNE.

[*Enters.*]

My, but there'll be a fine betrothal! A cute little calf!

META.

Whose betrothal?

SHAKHNE.

Hee, hee. My betrothal.

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META.

What sort of engagement, father?

BENDET.

My engagement. [*Laughter.*]

META.

Come over here, Tsipke. [*Tsipke sits down beside her and the two engage in playful contest.*]

BENDET.

What's your opinion, father, about the inn?

SHAKHNE.

Which inn? *That* one?

EISIK.

Over on the roadway. The abandoned one.

BENDET.

Well, father, what do you say?

SHAKHNE.

Set fire to it and have done. What else can you do with it? Are you going to start trouble with "them" over there?

META.

Ho, ho! If I were in my father's place, I'd have set fire to it long ago.

EISIK.

So! Set fire to it!

BENDET.

There's no need of setting fire to it. It's the place that's to blame.

SHIAKHNE.

Of course it's the place that's to blame.

TSIPKE.

Is that the inn that lights up of itself at night?

BENDET.

There, do you see? Even she knows about it.

EISIK.

Those are all imaginary tales! Neither here nor there. Who, for example, has ever seen the place light up?

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BENDET.

Ha, ha, ha, I'll tell you the truth: I'm a man, after all, and it's my property. But when I ride past there sometimes, at night, and it's dark — somehow or other, without wanting to, I snap the whip so that the horse shall step livelier. But it's nothing, nothing. When it wasn't needed it was left standing, and now we'll listen to nobody and we'll remove it from that site.

KHYENNE.

[Enters.]

META.

Mother, Reb Eisik wants to buy the abandoned inn.

KHYENNE.

Don't you dare to do it. Even though it's mine, I say no. I don't want to lead you into a mess.

BENDET.

Just listen to her chatter.

SHAKHNE.

Ekh, wouldn't "they" rave if the place were burned down.

KHYENNE.

Don't do it, Reb Eisik. That would be the last straw.

EISIK.

Matters haven't come to that point yet. We were simply discussing things. I say that we ought to remove the building from its present location and build it up on another site, for I personally believe that the structure itself is not at fault.

BENDET.

Certainly. The location is to blame.

KHYENNE.

And why did Dobbe die before her time?

BENDET.

Why Dobbe died? Much they know! What do you say, father, to our moving the inn from there — just as it stands? I mean to take it away, build it over again on another location, put fresh moss into it — or I wouldn't use any moss at all, for moss grows in dirt, in the marshes. I would suggest chinking it with flax: shingling the roof, putting in new windows.

META.

And new spirits will dance in it.

EISIK.

Yes, new spirits — young spirits will dance in it.
[*He smiles furtively and insinuatingly now at Bendet and now at Meta.*]

META.

I know what you mean.

BENDET.

What do you understand, and what do you know?

EISIK.

She likes it, so she laughs.

KHYENNE.

I can't understand why she laughs.

BENDET.

[*To Meta.*]

Well, enough of your laughing, now!

TSIPKE.

[*Looks at Meta and bursts into laughter.*]

BENDET.

Why this hilarity?

META.

My, what a couple of spirits there'll be!

EISIK.

What? My Leibush isn't good enough for you? He's nobody to be sneezed at. He'll know how to manage affairs all right.

BENDET.

The truth is the truth. I like him. Lately, when we had to look over the landowner's forest, I watched him from a distance. He's a husky, hard-working chap. No use talking.

EISIK.

Says nothing and does the work. If it's the soil, it's the soil. Business — is business. If it's a horse, it's a horse. Cattle — cattle. He won't prick his fingers at anything.

KHYENNE.

The truth is the truth.

SHAKHNE.

Listen, Eisik. If you would only grind me a box of snuff. I don't remember ever having sniffed such good stuff.

EISIK.

[*Gives him a pinch of snuff.*]

As soon as I get a little time I'll be glad to do it for you. Well, what do you say, Reb Shakhne?

SHAKHNE.

Excellent snuff. [*General laughter.*]

EISIK.

I'm asking you your opinion on the matter that we've just been discussing.

SHAKHNE.

What opinion can I have? Hee, hee, a celebration is a celebration. Why keep the calf in the barn?

KHYENNE.

The old fellow understands everything in his own way. But you, Bendet, allowed yourself to be convinced too easily. [*Referring to Meta.*] She imagines this is nothing but jest. I know your father.

BENDET.

Understand? It's too bad to let the place remain idle. Ever since the fairs have begun to take place in our vicinity the whole road has become lively. And we must take advantage of all this. I remember

ten years ago, on the very same road, you might have ridden along for a day and a night without ever catching a glimpse of a soul; not even hear the bell of a passing driver. If you met anybody it would be a Gentile peasant from your own town. You'd say "Good day" to him, or he'd say "Good day" to you; you'd exchange a pinch of snuff from each other's box, and continue on your way. What's the use of talking? Now when you set out on that road you meet strangers from other parts, from other cities. You hear the snapping of whips, see horses in triple harness, the bells tinkle — and on you go. A properly managed inn would find out all these things — where a man was journeying and why he was journeying. Besides, a Jew brings business. Wherever he comes there's business. Yes, I'm satisfied. Why should I deny it?

EISIK.

As truly as I'm a Jew, Bendet, I've thought of that many a time. Do you imagine that I didn't foresee all this?

KHYENNE.

Meta, darling child, go in and see if the food's cooked.

META.

[Goes sadly into the house.]

KHYENNE.

Understand me, Reb Eisik. Just as you see her, she's a healthy, ruddy child, and all she needs is a bit of luck. What do we ask on her behalf? She's an only daughter, and we wouldn't want to let her out of our sight. And if a match happens to turn up so near by, why all the better. But I don't know what he'll say to it — I mean his brother Pinye — and besides, it's practically a settled matter.

BENDET.

It sha'n't be! Useless talk, Khyenne. Here sits my brother's daughter, yet I say that I don't want it.

KHYENNE.

Then it won't be. I have nothing more to say.

BENDET.

He needn't come crawling into my barn; do you understand? As soon as suspicion fell upon him I said nothing doing! Our relationship is at an end — and that's all there is to it.

KHYENNE.

We ought to ask her, too.

EISIK.

Of course we ought to.

BENDET.

What she'll be told to do, she'll do. Her parents aren't going to bury her alive.

TSIPKE.

[The conversation embarrasses her and she goes into the house.]

KHYENNE.

Can't you keep anything to yourself? Didn't you see that the child was sitting right before your eyes?

BENDET.

Well, I don't want you to talk to me about my brother and his daughter.

KHYENNE.

But why so angry? When you're discussing a child's happiness, you ought to be a bit more calm. And we don't yet know the one who stole the horse from your barn.

BENDET.

Enough from you, now! Enough! What do you think I want, then? I want them to remain here near us. And I don't want to lose that road.

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KHYENNE.

And I don't want to let her out of the house. An only daughter. Does she, God forbid, lack anything to eat in her own home?

EISIK.

But one must always think of the morrow, and when children grow up, you must provide for the future.

KHYENNE.

What would you have, Reb Eisik? Speak to the point.

EISIK.

I say that you don't have to journey to Danzig for goods when you've got them in your own home town. When the apple-tree grows right behind your window, you don't have to climb over the fence. Well, then, it's my opinion that I don't have to travel long distances in search of a wife for my Leibush. And as far as your Meta is concerned, you don't have to travel to Danzig to get a husband for her, either.

KHYENNE.

So that —

EISIK.

So that we'll build them an inn on the main road that leads to both your place and to mine, and they'll live a comfortable life. You, on your side, will do

what you can for them, and I won't be found behind-hand on mine. I need no dowry from you. We are close relatives. We understand each other readily. I have already discussed with Bendet the proposal to remove the abandoned inn from its present site and build it over again on a spot we'll find suitable. Such a building! Still as strong as iron. I purposely cut off a strip of wood from it. I've got it there in the wagon. [*He walks out into the road.*]

KHYENNE.

Take my advice, Bendet, we ought to consider this matter well. We oughtn't to act as fast as we speak. And it isn't yet known who stole your horse out of the stall. The children love each other.

BENDET.

Nothing definite has been done yet.

EISIK.

[*Returns with a piece of chopped-off board.*]

Do you see the pitch dripping from it? As if it had been drying up in a garret. [*All examine the piece of wood.*]

SHAKHNE.

[*Smells the wood.*] Genuine hard lumber. It can last a good many years yet. [*A rooster's crowing is heard from behind the house.*] Aha, it'll rain tomorrow. [*All listen.*]

EISIK.

So you can see that it pays to make something out of such a building. [*Meta and Tsipke enter.*]

KHYENNE.

[*To Meta.*] What do you say, my child? We're supposed to ask your opinion, too.

META.

You know very well what my opinion is. And does Leibush know what you've been talking about here? Maybe he won't care to have me after all?

EISIK.

Just see how well she understands what we've been talking about. You simply say what *you* wish. *We'll* manage to get along with Leibush.

META.

[*Is silent.*]

BENDET.

See how silent she is. As if the discussion had nothing at all to do with her.

META.

I'm your only daughter. Then perhaps you understand that things will be best as you wish. [*Bursts suddenly into laughter.*]

KHYENNE.

What are you laughing about?

META.

I picture myself as the proprietress of an inn. The spirits will chase me about in the garret. Ha, ha, ha!

BENDET.

Tfu! May my enemies be plagued with such horrors! What a laugh!

KHYENNE.

Come, let's go in for supper.

BENDET.

Come into the house, Eisik, and let's have a bite. Spirits will hurt the business. If the evil spirits held weddings yonder in the inn, the building wouldn't be so strong today. And if the spirits ever foregather there, it's all up with the place.

[All walk toward the house. Suddenly a bell is heard on the road, from a distance, as if somebody had come journeying thither. For a moment all pause and listen to the bell.]

META.

That must be some merchants on their way.

KHYENNE.

They won't stop here. Go out, Bendet, to meet them.

BENDET.

I know that bell very well.

TSIPKE.

It'll soon be here.

EISIK.

They must be returning from a horse fair.

KHYENNE.

Go out, Bendet, and see who's coming.

META.

[Goes out to the road and disappears. The tinkling of the bell ceases. Soon a bell is heard again, and it seems as if some one had driven rapidly by behind the house, so as to avoid the inn. All hasten to the roadway.]

KHYENNE.

Look, Meta has disappeared! How those horses sped by! Where is Meta?

TSIPKE.

She's in the wagon. That's Itsik. I recognize his carriage. A triple harness of horses!

BENDET.

[Angrily.]

What sort of notion do you call this? How does she come into his carriage?

KHYENNE.

Good God! What is this?

TSIPKE.

I tell you that it's Itsik. See, they're driving in this direction. They'll stop here.

BENDET.

Tfu! May such misfortune befall my enemies! I don't like such things.

KHYENNE.

It's really Itsik.

BENDET.

She'll catch it from me. What's he coming to me for?

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KHYENNE.

See here, Bendet, don't make any ridiculous scenes. He's your brother's son.

BENDET.

What does she mean by getting into his carriage? I'll tear her hair out.

EISIK.

Don't make a fool of yourself, Bendet! You haven't changed a bit.

BENDET.

I don't want him to drive past my house. You can tell him, Khyenne, that he needn't come driving past my home with his horses.

KHYENNE.

What? Is the road forbidden?

*[The sound of an approaching carriage is heard
very near.]*

BENDET.

You tell him to turn back.

KHYENNE.

Go into the house. In with you.

BENDET.

[Walking toward the house.]

To think he should have the insolence to come to my home!

ITSIK.

[Follows him.]

There's no need of your getting excited, Bendet. You can manage things in a peaceful way, too. That's what I say.

[They enter the house.]

SHAKHNE.

[Goes into the house, too.]

KHUYENNE.

It's certainly Itsik.

[The tinkling of the bell stops at a short distance from the house. Horses are heard neighing. A dog barks. Laughter. Meta strides in, perspiring, but in high feather. After her comes Itsik, dressed in his best. There is something of the gypsy about him. He wears a dark red sash and carries a whip.]

ITSIK.

Well, how are you, auntie? And you, Tsipke, why don't you come home? I'll take you back with

me now. I didn't expect to be here at all. I started out on a different road altogether. I must have gone about a mile out of the way.

META.

None of them knew who it was. But I recognized the bell at once. Do you ride at night with a bell, too?

KHYENNE.

Why do you need to ride with a bell?

ITSIK.

So that people shall think it's wealthy lords riding to the hunt.

META.

You'll be attacked yet at night, and your bell will be stolen.

KHYENNE.

How is your father? What's the news over at your place? Children, you must go into the house. We'll have supper together.

[She goes into the house.]

ITSIK.

Is not your father home?

TSIPKE.

I'd advise you, Itsik, to ride home right away, and to take me with you.

META.

They're angry because you ran out onto the road. Why did Eisik come here?

[She takes the whip and snaps it.]

ITSIK.

I refuse to go into the house. When uncle comes out, I'll tell him to worry his own head about it.

META.

Eisik trumped up the accusation against you, and father says that on that night he heard somebody with a bell drive by our house twice. And he says that the bell sounded like yours. And when the horses were missed right after that, he said it was your work.

ITSIK.

[Bursts into laughter.]

Who could have told your father, the wise old fellow, and my uncle, such a tale? Tsipke, get into the house.

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TSIPKE.

I tell you, better leave this place and take me with you.

[Walks into the house.]

META.

I'd advise you to ride off as soon as possible. It's no use. If my father takes anything into his head, he's bound to have his way.

ITSIK.

We'll see. I'll have it out with him today. He needn't think that I stole his horses from the barn. I can bring other horses into his barn. And that has nothing to do with you. I'll spirit you out of your bed at night. I'll harness five horses and speed you away from your father's house. He may be an uncle of mine, but he needn't be so stubborn.

META.

I believe that tomorrow, or the day after, Eisik will agree to——.

ITSIK.

Don't mention it to me! We'll see who'll be first to find the way.

META.

They say that they'll rebuild the inn for me and Leibush. They'll drive out the evil spirits and establish us in the place. I heard them talking about it myself.

ITSIK.

And what did you say to it?

META.

I laughed.

ITSIK.

You laughed.

META.

They'll coop me up in a tavern to sit at the window all day long and gaze out on the road to see whether anybody's riding in our direction.

ITSIK.

Go into the house.

META.

And you?

ITSIK.

I'll not go into your house. I'll wait here until uncle comes out. I'll have a talk with him.

META.

About me?

ITSIK.

About the horses. I'll tell him that if he wishes, I can put other horses into his barn.

META.

And did you really take them out?

ITSIK.

Don't ask about that!

META.

Why did you come here now? I'm afraid you shouldn't have come here today, at just this time. Why did I run out to meet you? I shouldn't have hopped into your carriage.

TTSIK.

If you hadn't come out I would have ridden by without stopping.

META.

I'm so afraid, Itsik; I'm so afraid.

ITSIK.

I won't ride away from here today. I want to see Eisik first; and his conceited son. I want to show him who Itsik is.

META.

I beg you, leave the place. As truly as you love God, ride away. After all, I'll do just as my father and mother tell me to. Even if I should weep over it my whole life long.

ITSIK.

You sha'n't cry. I'll unharness my pair of black horses from the carriage and give them back to him.

META.

Itsik, do so.

ITSIK.

Let him wait! It wasn't I who took them out of his barn, and don't you mix into such affairs. Get into the house.

META.

Itsik—

ITSIK.

[*Embraces her; kisses her.*]

Ah, if you weren't my uncle's daughter, I'd kill you. I'd choke you and throw you under some

bridge at night. You witch. You grew up from the marshes. And yet you'll obey what your father tells you and what your —. Oh, I'll strangle you —!

META.

Ride away from here.

[*Khyenne's voice is heard from within: "Meta, Meta! Come right into the house!"*]

ITSIK.

Go into the house. Your mother's calling you.

META.

[*About to go.*]

ITSIK.

Wait a moment. Don't hurry. Tell that father of yours that I haven't gone away yet. I'd tear you to shreds —. I'd rip your wild locks off your head. [*He holds her hand and looks suspiciously into her eyes.*] If you want to go into the house — go —.

META.

[*Caresses his head.*]

Itsik, I'll steal a couple of horses from some place or other and put them back into his barn.

ITSIK.

Enough on that score!

[It begins to darkle. The birds twitter.]

META.

[Laughs restrainedly.]

If I should settle in that inn! Oh, wouldn't I love it! I myself will play about with the spirits. I'll pull them by the braids. Leibush! Booh! Do you know, Itsik, that Leibush is a fine chap? He's very good-natured. How good he is! Whenever he visits us, or I come to visit them, he looks at me with such kind eyes.

ITSIK.

[About to strike her with the whip. She does not notice his movement. He restrains himself.]

META.

[Turns suddenly to him, her face concealed by her hands, and speaks to him with hidden passion.]

Strike me with the whip. over the shoulders, on my side; so — give me a good thrashing, because I'm such a bad girl. Brrrrr! I could tear my hair out. Yes, these very braids of mine. When my father talks I'm as still as a dove. As quiet as a tiny

hen, and I do everything he bids me. Do you know, Itsik, you're just like my father, and yet you hate him so. Make friends with him again. When my father speaks I'm as silent as a little dove. Make friends with him. Here they come now. Make up with him.

[Takes the whip from him and snaps it. Enter Bendet and Eisik.]

BENDET.

Then it's agreed that tomorrow we'll hire some men to take the abandoned inn apart; let the wood get a little airing and right after the wedding it'll be rebuilt.

[He catches sight of Itsik, but he avoids him.]

ITSIK.

Uncle, I've brought the horses back to you.

BENDET.

Tomorrow, Meta, my darling daughter, you are to be betrothed. Understand?

META.

[Is silent.]

BENDET.

Come to me, my girl.

KHYENNE.

[Comes out of the house.]

BENDET.

Here's your mother. Go to her and promise that you'll obey everything that father and mother will ask of you.

KHYENNE.

[To Itsik.]

Why do you remain outside? Come in and have a bite.

ITSIK.

I'm not hungry. Reb Eisik, how's your son? He's soon to be engaged, so I hear.

EISIK.

It's high time.

ITSIK.

[To Bendet.]

Uncle, I've brought back your horses.

BENDET.

There's no use in your hovering about this place.

ITSIK.

And there's no reason why you should be angry with me, uncle.

BENDET.

[*To Meta.*]

Go into the house. Grandpa wants to see you.

ITSIK.

I've heard, Reb Eisik, that you want to drive the evil spirits out of the haunted inn and move into the place.

KHYENNE.

Itsik, you mustn't mention such a thing.

ITSIK.

[*Goes over to Bendet.*]

Uncle, I don't know what to say about your horses.

BENDET.

[*Sharply.*]

And I won't let you have my daughter!

KHYENNE.

Bendet.

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BENDET.

Meta will be engaged to Eisik's son on tomorrow or the day after, and we'll drive the spirits out of the haunted inn. Let nobody worry on that score!

ITSIK.

[*Laughs.*]

BENDET.

And when I ask him in a polite way to tell me who stole the horses out of my barn, he tells me that he'll give me back other horses. [*He strides over to Itzik.*] Will you tell me where my horses are? Where are my horses?

KHYENNE.

Bendet, consider what you are doing.

BENDET.

I don't want to have anything more to do with my own brother, if that's the sort of scoundrel he's brought up.

META.

Father, father.

EISIK.

Let him alone, the outcast.

ITSIK.

Give your Leibush my best regards, won't you, Eisik?

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KHYENNE.

[Takes Itsik by the hand.]

Come into the house. Come, I'll give you something to eat.

ITSIK.

Let me be, auntie. I won't quarrel with him. I know Uncle Bendet very well —. Let him not get so angry. When I tell him that I don't know anything about the horses, he refuses to believe me. I don't go crawling around uncle's barns. And I have to make lengthy explanations.

BENDET.

We know — we know all about that.

EISIK.

Well, I'm going home.

ITSIK.

Eisik, you won't drive the spirits out of the inn.

EISIK.

Bite your tongue off.

ITSIK.

I've bitten my tongue once already.

BENDET.

We know all about that. You may as well go home, too.

ITSIK.

I'll go home when I please.

[Cracks the whip.]

BENDET.

Go home alone, Eisik. You can bring back the horse tomorrow.

EISIK.

Good night.

[Exit.]

KHYENNE.

Give everybody our regards.

ITSIK.

[Cracks the whip. Growling "Good night," he walks off toward the road. Bendet and Khyenne stroll toward the road, too.]

META.

[She is left alone. She dashes hither and thither like a wild beast in a cage. Runs toward the rear and stands upon the fence, waving her

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hand as if signalling to somebody from a distance. Horses are heard whinnying, the bell tinkles, and she jumps down from the fence. Bendet and Khyenne return.]

BENDET.

Meta, my darling child, come to me.

META.

[Approaches him; she speaks in a soft voice.]

What, father?

BENDET.

Do you know that you're to be engaged tomorrow?

META.

I know.

BENDET.

Do you like Eisik's son?

META.

Yes, I like him.

BENDET.

And you'll love him after the wedding?

META.

I'll love him.

KHYENNE.

And you won't forget your father and mother?

META.

[Is silent.]

Well, let's come into the house now.

[It has already become dark. A rooster on the roof begins to crow. The calf in the barn starts to bleat.]

META.

[Steals softly out of the house, and hastens to the fence in the background. She climbs upon it and beckons to some one in the silence.]

ITSIK.

[Appears at the other side of the fence and climbs up to Meta.]

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

SCENE: *A summer evening. At Bendet's. A spacious room with whitewashed walls, lighted by candles set into candlesticks as well as into a large, well-scoured Sabbath candelabra that hangs from the ceiling. The brass glisters. Everything is neat and in its place. The door in the background and the windows are open. The lower half of each window is hidden by sash-curtains. The floor is covered with green rush. Two simple long tables, spread with coarse, but very neat tablecloths, stand to the right and to the left. The tables are prepared with bottles and saucers.*

SHAKHNE.

[He is seated near the door, in a corner, grating horse-radish.]

KHYENNE.

[Enters, with sleeves rolled up, evidently very hard at work.]

It would be better, father-in-law, if you went outside to grate that horse-radish.

SHAKHNE.

It's certainly strong. It just burns your eyes out.

[About to leave.]

KHYENNE.

Never mind; you may as well stay. Where can you go now?

SHAKHNE.

Do you know where I found it?

KHYENNE.

[Putting the place in order.]

Found what?

SHAKHNE.

The horse-radish. Over yonder, on the past year's potato patches.

KHYENNE.

And you couldn't get the precious bargain any nearer?

SHAKHNE.

There isn't any. Not for love or money. Why, do you know how badly it's lacking? As if it weren't grown here.

KHYENNE.

Father-in-law!

SHAKHNE.

What, my child? Are you exhausted with your work?

KHYENNE.

Go to your son and persuade him to send a couple of horses after Pinye at once.

SHAKHNE.

Such an obstinate fellow! Such an obstinate fellow!

KHYENNE.

A man ought to know when to be obstinate, and when not. He imagines he's dealing with a peasant about a horse. Why, people might, God forbid — I'm afraid to mention it. And then again, why has he taken it into his head to tear down the abandoned inn on this particular day? I'm afraid to speak a word about it. And the whole affair — It makes me feel so badly. We live so far from people. That's a fine way to marry off an only child.

SHAKHNE.

Really and truly, it's a sin.

KHYENNE.

[*Through tears.*]

He's marrying off his only child, and here he has to continue a quarrel. Now if it were a brother of mine, I'd overlook everything; but it's his own brother, a son of yours, and yet you say nothing —.

SHAKHNE.

I told him that it would be a grievous sin if Pinye doesn't attend the wedding. If Pinye were a sensible person he'd harness a couple of horses, take along his wife and child and drive over.

KHYENNE.

Without an invitation?

SHAKHNE.

And it's not right to provoke one's father, either. If I have two sons and one of them is marrying off his daughter, the other should not be absent from the ceremony.

KHYENNE.

If only the Almighty would put it into his head to come of his own accord —. The poor child was crying today, too. "Im getting married today," she sobbed, "and Uncle Pinye hasn't come." I beg you, father-in-law, command him as a father commands his own child, to harness the horses and send for Pinye.

SHAKHNE.

I'll tell him to do that.

BENDET.

[*Enters.*]

So you're here, are you? And I've been hunting for you everywhere.

SHAKHNE.

Did you need me for anything?

BENDET.

I'm afraid that there won't be enough room for our guests in the other house.

KHYENNE.

That won't hurt. It's a beautiful night, and if any one wants to sleep in the open, we'll make a fine place for him. Or up the loft, in the hay.

BENDET.

That's right, too.

KHYENNE.

Has the child spoken to you?

BENDET.

What could she have had to say to me?

KIYENNE.

[Looks at him sadly.]

BENDET.

What did she have to say to me? You're a foolish woman. What are you standing there with rolled-up sleeves for, staring at me like that? Give yourself a wash, dress up, for before you know it the whole crowd will be here.

KIYENNE.

The thing's not being done right. Something's missing.

BENDET.

Why isn't the thing being done right? We'll even have musicians, too. Gentiles, to be sure, but musicians, after all.

KIYENNE.

I'd be glad to spare the musicians.

BENDET.

Then what is it you want?

KIYENNE.

There! You're angry again.

BENDET.

What are you grating that horse-radish for, father?

SHAKHNE.

[Shaking out the grater.]

Very well. I won't grate any more. And now, my son, I want you to order a couple of horses to be harnessed and sent after Pinye and his wife and child.

BENDET.

[At a loss.]

KHYENNE.

You yourself regret your obstinacy now. It serves you right. Some day you'll pay for those little whims of yours.

BENDET.

That's none of your business!

KHYENNE.

Of course it's none of my business, and it's none of your father's business, and it's none of your daughter's business. And that the poor child was crying today doesn't concern you at all, I suppose.

BENDET.

What do you all want of me?

KHYENNE.

Nobody asks anything of you. Do as you think best. Here's my daughter getting married, and we'll have strangers as guests, while our own relations will be missing.

SHAKHNE.

That's not the way proper folks do things.

BENDET.

[*Laughs.*]

And suppose I've already sent after my brother? Is that all right?

KHYENNE.

Tell me, is that true?

SHAKHNE.

If he says so, you can believe him.

BENDET.

I knew that you'd have it against me for the rest of my life — that Pinye and his family weren't at my child's wedding. So I went and sent for them.

KHYENNE.

When? Early in the morning?

BENDET.

At daybreak. I sent word that his father, his sister-in-law and the bride invited him to the wedding.

KHYENNE.

And you didn't invite him in your name?

BENDET.

He's a brother of mine, isn't he?

KHYENNE.

God have pity upon such a brother.

[*Weeps.*]

BENDET.

[*Laughs.*]

Just look at her. I invited him in my name, too. There, are you satisfied? According to my reckoning they ought to be here soon.

KHYENNE.

[*Shouting.*]

Meta, Meta! Father sent to ask uncle to the wedding.

META.

[Enters gleefully from her room, and throws her arms around Bendet's neck.]

BENDET.

Just see how happy the little girl has become.

META.

I love you so for it!

KHYENNE.

You ought to dress right away, my child.

META.

[Kisses Bendet.]

And now I'll dress.

[Hastens back to her room.]

KHYENNE.

I don't want the child to hear what I say. It seems to me that today we ought not touch the abandoned inn. Today is the wedding day. I don't dare to say what I feel —.

BENDET.

[Sternly.]

Don't mention that to me now! . Do you hear?

We'll have the ceremony take place right before the house.

[A bell is heard.]

SHAKHNE.

Somebody's coming!

KHYENNE.

That must be some of our wedding guests. Go, Bendet, and show them to the other house.

META.

[Calling from her room.]

They're coming! They're riding in a big truck.

BENDET.

[Exit.]

KHYENNE.

Go along too, father-in-law, and help out.

SHAKHNE.

Yes, I'll be off right away.

[Exit.]

KHYENNE.

[Calls.]

Come to me, my child. I'll help you hook your dress.

META.

[Comes out wearing a new, bright blue gown.]

The dress is brand new.

KHYENNE.

[Hooks the dress and kisses Meta.]

May you be ever happy. May you bring us plenty of pleasure. How beautiful you look.

META.

How is it, mother, at a city wedding?

KHYENNE.

Who knows anything about city things?

META.

If we only had some good musicians.

KHYENNE.

In God's good season you'll enjoy a sweet life, even as it is. And now, my child, let me comb your hair.

[Combs the maiden's hair. Again there comes the sound of vehicles driving up to the house.]

META.

[Runs to the window.]

Mama, mama! A full wagon of guests!

KHYENNE.

[Looks out of the window.]

They come from Lyentschwitz, my child. Father's taking them into the other house.

META.

Somebody's coming here.

A WOMAN.

[Enters, bearing a large copper pan of fish.]

How appetizing it smells! May her fortune prove as sweet, with God's will. Where shall I put this?

KHYENNE.

In the other room, Hannah dear.

[Woman goes into the next room.]

WOMAN.

[Returning.]

There'll be plenty of folks to eat the fish, all right. Hurry up a bit, Khyenne.

[Exit.]

META.

Listen. There comes another wagon. Mother, you're not at all happy.

KHYENNE.

Before a girl's married, my child, she dwells with her parents, and their luck is hers. After the wedding, however, you're given two little sacks, in one of which is good fortune and in the other, sorrow and pain, and God knows —.

[Gives her child a lingering kiss, but says nothing. Both embrace tightly. From without comes the sound of Bendet's voice, crying: "Folks are arriving already!" A maiden's pealing laughter is heard. Khyenne and Meta wake from their distraction. They separate and gaze expectantly at the door. Guests enter, rural Jewish women and maidens, mothers with babes in their arms and children tagging at their sides, all dressed in provincial Jewish style. The girls and the women kiss Meta and wish her "Good luck."]

FIRST WOMAN.

A bride like a queen.

SECOND WOMAN.

As dazzling as the sun.

THIRD WOMAN.

Sometimes parents get more pleasure out of one child than others get out of ten.

FIRST MAIDEN.

Meta, aren't you at all bashful before me?

META.

Yes, I really am.

[Laughter.]

FIRST WOMAN.

Such a husband. A diamond of a chap. They'll lead a happy life, God willing.

KHYENNE.

What more could a mother wish! I remember when I was a little girl. I looked exactly like her.

SECOND MAIDEN.

The years run by.

THIRD WOMAN.

And yet my Pearl says that she has plenty of time. "What?" she asks. "Haven't I time enough? Let my cheeks," she says, "be able to blush a while longer."

FIRST WOMAN.

Meta dear, why haven't you put on your veil?
In the city they put on the veil at the first sign of
evening.

SECOND WOMAN.

Just look at her. A regular princess.

KHYENNE.

*[Brings in a veil and they deck Meta's head
with it.]*

FIRST MAIDEN.

And now Meta's head is veiled. Why are you sad,
Meta dear?

[Enter other maidens with bouquets of flowers.]

KHYENNE.

Just see, just see, how kind our friends are.

[The maidens kiss the bride.]

FIRST MAIDEN.

We've hunted out every sort of flower for you.

SECOND MAIDEN.

We walked for miles through forest and field, and
plucked the fairest flowers.

FIRST WOMAN.

How beautiful she is! May good fortune always smile upon her.

FIRST MAIDEN.

Meta is pale from fasting. Aren't you, Meta dear?

META.

[Makes no reply.]

SECOND WOMAN.

What will she lack at her husband's? Won't he fetch her even the dome of the heavens?

THIRD WOMAN.

Why, he takes after his mother from head to foot. His mother — may she dwell forever in Paradise — he has her face, her eyes, and even her voice. They're as much alike as two drops of water.

[Enter two Gentile musicians of the village. One of them has a fiddle wrapped in a red kerchief; the other, a drum. There is a stir in the crowd.]

FIRST MUSICIAN.

Good evening!

SECOND MUSICIAN.

Give a fellow a drink in honor of the wedding.

KHYENNE.

I'll give them each a glass of brandy, right away.

[She hurries into the next room and returns with two glasses of brandy and some slices of white bread. The musicians drink, wipe their mouths, eat the bread, and soon begin to play. They play a village dance with intense enthusiasm and liveliness. The maidens make room, standing aside; the bride is seated upon a chair, with a pillow beneath her. Beside her are ranged her maiden friends, holding bouquets of flowers. Soon the dance begins. Four women, in pairs, one couple opposite the other, commence a hop; they are very soon followed by two maidens in the same dance. As the crowd looks eagerly on, the pairs change. In the windows are seen the faces of inquisitive Gentile peasant girls watching the fun.]

A MAIDEN.

I want to dance with the bride.

VOICES.

With the bride! With the bride!

META.

[Rises from her place and dances with each one in succession.]

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ITSIK.

[Appears unexpectedly upon the threshold. He is accompanied by two other young men. He is in holiday attire.]

META.

[Catches sight of him. Interrupts her dance. She rushes to greet him. The dissatisfaction of her girl friends is very evident; they whisper to each other and glance in Itsik's direction. The playing ceases.]

KHYENNE.

[To Itsik.]

Has your father come, too?

ITSIK.

Father's not here. Tsipke came.

META.

Uncle didn't want to come. How about you?
Why didn't you take him along?

FIRST WOMAN.

That's no way to treat a brother. He ought to be ashamed of himself.

SECOND WOMAN.

At a wedding it's the same as before the Day of Atonement. Folks should make up all differences.

KHYENNE.

Did they ever quarrel?

META.

[Aside, to Itsik.]

Why have you come so late?

ITSIK.

But I came, didn't I? It's not going to be such an easy matter.

TSIPKE.

[Enters.]

KHYENNE.

[Runs to meet her.]

Why didn't you simply force your father along to the wedding?

[They kiss.]

ITSIK.

Understand, auntie, that our family likes to do the right thing —. Well, dance, ladies! Dance, girls!

Why are you so quiet? If nobody looks, I'll have a little dance myself. [*To his two companions, who have been flirting with the girls.*] Khayim! Abraham! Steal a dance or two! Give us a tune, musicians! [*The young men dance.*] That's the way. I'll soon see whether I remember any steps. Play louder! That's the way —.

[*He enters the dance. The young men yield to him. As he dances he seizes a different girl every time. Then he catches hold of the bride, who at first offers slight resistance, and then surrenders completely. Fiddle and drum play away most energetically.*]

FIRST WOMAN.

Enough! She'll swoon.

SECOND WOMAN.

He's as wild as if he had just broken free from chains.

KHYENNE.

[*Beckons the musicians to stop. The playing suddenly ceases.*]

META.

[*Sinks into her chair. She is pale.*]

ITSIK.

That's the way spirits dance in the marshes.

A WOMAN.

Tfu! A fine time to mention their name.

ITSIK.

The devil won't take us.

KHYENNE.

Go, Itsik, my boy. Go over to the men. Pay your respects to the groom.

BENDET.

[*Enters.*]

The musicians are needed in the groom's room.

ITSIK.

Congratulations, uncle! My father — your brother — says that he knows how to be obstinate, too.

BENDET.

I allow nothing to spoil my celebration today.

ITSIK.

You see, uncle, I take after you. I, too, don't believe in spoiling good times. When an uncle marries off his daughter, Itsik comes to the wedding.

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BENDET.

*[Beckons Itsik and the musicians to follow him.
They do so.]*

ITSIK.

[Calling his young companions.]

To the groom, boys!

[Exeunt the young men and Itsik.]

META.

[Feels weak.]

Come to me, mother dear.

KHYENNE.

What's the matter, my darling child?

FIRST WOMAN.

The poor thing's faint from fasting.

SECOND WOMAN.

She's exhausted from dancing.

FIRST MAIDEN.

He came near breaking every bone in my body as
we danced.

[General laughter.]

SECOND MAIDEN.

I don't call that dancing. When you take off your shoes and stockings and dance a chase — that's more to my taste. [*To a girl near by.*] Do you remember that dance, Zlattke?

THIRD MAIDEN.

I know ten different dances. I can dance longer than any of them.

[From outside comes the rumble of approaching carts. Several bells tinkle. Some of the guests in the room hasten to the window, others to the door, while yet others go out.]

KHYENNE.

Who could have arrived just now? Maybe Pinye?

FIRST MAIDEN.

[Looking through the window.]

Guests. Wedding guests. In big carts.

SECOND MAIDEN.

One, two, three. Three packed carts are out there.

THIRD MAIDEN.

And here comes a fourth.

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FIRST MAIDEN.

Who can they be? Strangers, it seems.

KHYENNE.

They must surely be merchants. Driving to a fair somewhere.

[Looks through the window.]

SECOND MAIDEN.

Just see! Three horses harnessed to each wagon!

TSIPKE.

[Enters from outside.]

Merchants were riding along the road. They heard that there was a wedding here, so they drove over. They heard the musicians playing.

A MAIDEN.

[Entering excitedly from outside.]

Wealthy merchants with the costliest wares! They're unharnessing the horses. They'll stay here over night, most likely.

SHAKHNE.

[Enters.]

Hee, hee, hee! God hasn't forsaken us. Merchants have come from afar and are going to stay here

overnight. At least ten of them. They'll remain with us for the wedding feast. [*To Meta.*] See daughter, how lucky you are.

A VOICE.

[*Calling from outside.*]

Grandpa! Where's grandpa?

SHAKHNE.

Here I come. Here I come.

[*Exit. Outside, musicians are playing.*]

VOICES.

Here comes the groom. He's going to put the veil over the bride's head.

Stand back. Make passage.

Be ready with hops in your hands!

KUYENNE.

[*Fetches a little sack of hops, carries it around, and each person takes a generous handful. An expectant pause.*]

LEIBUSH.

[*He is led in by the arm, advances to the bride and covers her head with an edge of her veil. All the members of the groom's family stand*

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in the doorway, with candles in their hands, waiting. The maidens and guests shower him with hops from every direction until he leaves.]

A WOMAN.

They'll soon be leading you to the wedding canopy, too, Meta dear.

A MAIDEN.

Soon, soon, Meta dear.

TSIPKE.

There! The canopy's up! Look! The merchants are coming along, too!

VOICES.

They've lighted their lanterns and are going to witness the ceremony.

How beautiful!

META.

I want to go to the window.

FIRST WOMAN.

It's not right to look through the window now.

SECOND WOMAN.

Let her look. She's only a child. What harm can it do?

A MAIDEN.

Soon, soon they'll be leading her to the canopy, too.

VOICES.

Get ready! Get ready!

Meta dear, you'll soon be standing beneath the canopy.

KIHYENNE.

Take the candles out of the sticks. There isn't the slightest breeze outside.

[The playing outside ceases.]

VOICES.

They'll soon be coming for the bride.

Good luck to you, Meta dear!

Good luck!

They haven't any wedding minstrel here.

She'll have a happy enough life as it is.

Her good fortune will glitter like the stars in heaven.

Her luck will shine like the sun.

[Behind the door the music may be heard, but it is now much louder than before. It is evident that more musicians have arrived.]

The Haunted Inn

A MAIDEN.

[Comes running in.]

The merchants themselves are playing. They have their own fiddles and fifes. They say that they alone will provide the music. Listen, listen to their playing.

FIRST WOMAN.

What He in heaven can bring about!

SECOND WOMAN.

Need a body worry, Hannah? If God so pleases, He shows what He can do.

THIRD WOMAN.

Half the world could show nothing better.

A MAIDEN.

What playing! Enough to send you into ecstasies!

BENDET.

*[Enters. Is in an exalted mood, as if to say:
"Just see, what things can take place at
Bendet's!"]*

Are you all ready here? This is what you call a wedding!

*[From outside comes the sound of loud, lively
music.]*

A WOMAN.

Father and mother, father and mother will lead
their darling daughter.

VOICES.

Make way!
Bless the happy hour.

A MAIDEN.

Stand in a row to right and left, and take care of
the candles.

SECOND WOMAN.

Make way! Father and mother are leading their
only daughter to the wedding canopy!

THIRD WOMAN.

Would to God my daughter were being married
already, and in such fine style.

FIRST WOMAN.

And with such honor; and such abundance —.
Careful, now, careful. Don't stumble over the
threshold.

*[The bride is led out. Gradually all leave,
carrying the candles. Only two candles are
left burning in the room. From outside is
reflected a dull light that comes from the
illumination around the wedding canopy.]*

ITSIK.

[Steals in through a side window. He hurries into the other room. Comes out with something resembling a shawl. He looks about for other things, but soon disappears the same way that he came. Shortly afterward two girls enter. They carry garlands of wild-flowers.]

FIRST MAIDEN.

Let's stand in front of the door like this — so that it'll look like a gate. You stand at the right and I to the left.

SECOND MAIDEN.

That'll be really beautiful.

FIRST MAIDEN.

Our flowers are the prettiest.

SECOND MAIDEN.

They certainly are.

FIRST MAIDEN.

Get ready. Raise your wreath higher. Let them both be at the same height. That's the way. A little higher.

[Both stand there expectantly, holding the wreathes aloft so as to form an arch. Behind the door are heard the cries: "Congratulations!" "Congratulations!" "Make way!" "Right foot first!" Two women come running in. They hasten into the next room. They return carrying on a platter a large loaf of white bread and a bottle of brandy. They dance before the door, awaiting the newly-wed couple. Soon bride and groom appear, followed by the various relatives, while the music continues to play outside. The candles are put back into their places. The wedded couple are seated at the head of the table. Peasant folk, dressed in their best, come in. Among them is Itsik. His bearing is suspicious. He plainly avoids encountering Bendet. The playing ceases.]

BENDET.

[Speaking, from the doorway, to some one outside.]

And now you are all welcome in my house. Change your clothes and come in.

KHIYENNE.

Ask them to come right in, Bendet.

EISIK.

Of course. Just give them time to change clothes. Before, they say, they were musicians. Now they will be wedding guests. Well, Bendet, now we're really relatives. So let's drink a health to each other.

KHYENNE.

I'm afraid, Bendet, that there won't be room for everybody.

BENDET.

I'll unhinge the doors, and I'll push the walls back; of the doors we'll make tables. Itsik! Why are you standing there like a statue? Bring in the saw-horse! It's near the barn. And I'll take off the door.

[He unhinges the door of the next room.]

ITSIK.

[Exit.]

META.

[Who all this time seems to be lost in a daze.]

Papa, why do you keep speaking to Itsik in such an angry voice? Today is my wedding day. I want you to make up with him.

BENDET.

Can't you see that we're friends again? I've just told him to bring in the saw-horse, and later we'll drink to each other's health. I don't like to spoil festivities.

[The girls whisper to one another secretly.]

EISIK.

Let's put grandfather at the head of the table!

FIRST RELATIVE.

Grandfather at the head of the table!

SECOND RELATIVE.

Here, friend. The grandfather at the head of the table — close by the newlyweds. Grandpa will dance tonight with everybody.

SHAKUNE.

You just watch how I dance. I'll dance with my grandchildren.

ITSIK.

[Carries in a couple of saw-horses. Place is made for them. Across them a door is laid, which Khyenne covers with a large, coarse tablecloth, thus improvising a table.]

BENDET.

Don't be seated yet! First, your ablutions! There's a bucket of water outside.

A RELATIVE.

And have you prepared a bucket of brandy, too, Bendet?

BENDET.

More than one. There'll be plenty.

[One by one the crowd goes out, returning with wet hands. At the door stands one of the women of the family holding a long, coarse, towel upon which the crowd dries its hands. Then they take their seats at the table, men and women sitting in separate groups. The children are seated upon the top of the oven.]

BENDET.

[Proudly and in dignified manner he seeks to satisfy the wants of every guest.]

EISIK.

Aha! The feast is progressing merrily! Just see what they've brought along!

LEIBUSH.

[To Itsik.]

Did you take a look at their horses?

[Laughter.]

ITSIK.

I even counted their teeth.

EISIK.

What do you say to them, Bendet?

[Ten merchants enter. They are dressed in Jewish style, some of them in soft hats and with girdles about their waists, others with flowing beards that reach to their chests. They bring with them bottles of wine and various packages. As they enter they wish everybody "Good luck!" and offer congratulations. There is a hushed stir in the crowd, as if each guest were anxious to make room for the newcomers.]

FIRST MERCHANT.

We don't drive around empty-handed. We've found some wine and a bite to go with it, in our wagons.

[They put the wine upon the table. The crowd looks eagerly on.]

BENDET.

My house, thank God, lacks nothing, either.

FIRST MERCHANT.

We'll have a sip of every drink.

SECOND MERCHANT.

Every wine is good. And the best wine is the wine
you drink at the wedding of a happy couple.

[The guests laugh contentedly.]

EISIK.

That's what you call visitors!

KHYENNE.

If I only knew that we were to be honored with
such guests.

BENDET.

We'll introduce everybody. You see this is the
groom and that is the bride — my daughter. There's
nobody to be ashamed of here.

FIRST MERCHANT.

We have an excellent set of table companions.

BENDET.

[To the merchants.]

My dear friends, be so kind as to wash up.

[The merchants do so and take their places.]

KHYENNE.

*[Together with two other women she fetches food
from the next room for all the guests. The
crowd drinks freely.]*

FIRST MERCHANT.

[To his boy.]

Bring my fiddle in. It's on the wagon.

SECOND MERCHANT.

Fetch my flute, too, while you're about it.

THIRD MERCHANT.

Get my fiddle, too.

FOURTH MERCHANT.

And you may as well carry along my clarinet.

[A stir of pleasant anticipation in the crowd.]

KIYENNE.

[To the wedded couple.]

In what a happy hour we led you beneath the wedding canopy!

[The boy goes out.]

A MERCHANT.

[Offering Bendet a bottle of wine.]

Pour some into the wine that the bridal couple is drinking, friend.

BENDET.

[Looking the bottle over.]

That's what you call the real stuff.

[Does as he has been asked to do.]

FIRST MERCHANT.

And now we'll drink a health to the parents of the couple. I believe your name is Bendet?

BENDET.

Bendet will drink a health with everybody. Friends, why are you so silent? And you, father, why are you sitting so quietly? Have you forgotten the years gone by? And you, Itsik, what do you mean by standing there like a corpse in the corner? Let bygones be bygones. Don't harbor any hard feelings against Papa Bendet. Let bygones be bygones. Today let's see what you can do.

EISIK.

Really, Itsik, why are you so silent? They've asked you to show what you can do.

ITSIK.

Since they ask, I'll comply. And you, Meta, and you, Leibush will you drink a health with me?

LEIBUSH.

With you, any time, day or night.

ITSIK.

And you, Meta.

META.

[Makes no reply. Looks around for help in the matter.]

KHYENNE.

How long since is it that I was a mere child — ?

ITSIK.

Do you imagine, auntie, that Meta is still a mere child?

KHYENNE.

What else, then? Do you think she's not?

FIRST MERCHANT.

[To Itzik.]

It certainly doesn't look as if *you* were a little child.

[The remark calls forth contented laughter from the guests.]

THE BOY.

[Brings in two fiddles, a flute and a clarinet.]

Now we'll furnish the music ourselves.

FIRST MERCHANT.

And we'll dance till dawn.

SECOND MERCHANT.

And tomorrow is another day.

THIRD MERCHANT.

We'll make merry till Saturday.

BENDET.

[Somewhat heated with the wine.]

My dear friends, you're forgetting the fair to which you're riding. They'll be expecting you there.

A RELATIVE.

We won't let them go.

EISIK.

They've fallen right out of the sky.

FIRST MERCHANT.

Well, brother, strike up a lively tune!

[They do so. The other merchants keep time by slapping their palms together. There is not enough room, so the guests who aren't dancing sit upon the tables and the benches.]

VOICES.

Now let the parents of the couple dance.

Show us what you can do, Bendet.

And you'll remember your old skill, Reb Eisik.

The parents of the couple! The parents of the couple!

That's the way! Make room!

With the wine-bottles in their hands — ha, ha, ha! Both of them with the wine-bottles in their hands.

[Eisik and Bendet, with bottles in their hands, start to dance.]

BENDET.

Livelier, livelier! Eisik, you're slow. Livelier!

A VOICE FROM THE CROWD.

Now all of us in a circle, with the couple in the middle!

[The playing continues. The crowd takes hands, dances in a circle and within the circle dance the bride and bridegroom, not clasping each other, but holding the opposite corners of the same handkerchief.]

LEIBUSH.

[Beckons to Itsik, who is standing aloof, to come and join the dance.]

The Haunted Inn

ITSIK.

[With an outcry.]

Make way! The bride wants to dance!

[All make room, while the playing continues.]

META.

[Mutely, she starts to dance. She turns like a whirlwind and is soon followed by Itsik. He beckons to two youths, who follow him into the dance, capering about separately within the circle and making the floor tremble beneath them.]

A VOICE.

The mother now! The mother! Khyenne, why so silent?

KHYENNE.

[Is drawn into the dance.]

SHAKHNE.

[Rises, somewhat intoxicated, from his place, places a bottle upon his head and prepares to dance.]

EISIK.

Hush! hush! Not a sound! Grandpa is going to dance!

[The playing and the dancing cease.]

FIRST WOMAN.

Now, Reb Shakhne, let's see some dancing that'll shame the younger folk!

SHAKHNE.

I'll dance a jig at my grandchildren's wedding, with a bottle on my head, filled to the neck.

[A merchant gives him a full bottle of wine. He begins to sing a tune, dancing time to it. The merchants know the tune and they soon take it up on their instruments. The old fellow begins to wobble, the bottle falls from his head and is shattered. From the crowd rises a cry of fright. The playing ceases, while Shakhne stands in amazement, lost.]

FIRST WOMAN.

Well, age isn't youth.

SECOND WOMAN.

We shouldn't have urged him.

KHYENNE.

What's the difference? Let that be the scapegoat for all our sins.

[She picks up the fragments.]

BENDET.

Don't worry, dad. It'll be all right.

[He seats Shakhne.]

EISIK.

Let's see to the wedding presents now.

BENDET.

Just as you wish. Wedding presents, then. But why have you all become so sad? A bottle of wine broke. Well, there are plenty of others where that came from. There'll be enough. Fill your glasses, friends. Your health! Your health! No gloom, now! That's the way! Your health!

THE MERCHANTS.

[Whisper something among themselves. One of them leaves.]

BENDET.

[Announces.]

The parents of the couple will build an inn for them close by the main road.

A RELATIVE.

That's what you call a wedding present! That's my idea of how to do things.

EISIK.

I agree. That's why I'm so fond of you, Bendet.

KHYENNE.

[Brings in from the adjoining room a pair of well-scoured candlesticks.]

And I give two of my candlesticks. You'll have a fine set to pray before. And your mama also presents these two ear-rings to her child.

[She removes from her ears the pair of ear-rings and puts them on Meta.]

FIRST MERCHANT.

I am bringing my daughter a golden chain and a brooch. I'll get her another chain, and this one I'll give the bride as my gift. *[Takes from his pocket a golden chain and a brooch, wrapped up, and presents it to the bride.]* I want to place it about her neck myself, as if she were my own child.

VOICES

Ah how beautiful! It's hardly believable.

It must cost a fortune.

Solid gold.

Whose eye ever looked upon such jewelry?

Not even in a dream.

The Haunted Inn

SECOND MERCHANT.

[Taking a string of pearls from his inside pocket, and advancing to the bride.]

God will send me plenty of customers, and they'll pay for these pearls, too. Let her mother put it on for her.

KHYENNE.

[Very awkwardly she fastens the pearls around the bride's neck.]

My grandmother, may she dwell in Paradise, wore no pearls either.

A MAIDEN.

Why don't you say something, Meta dear? As if nothing were happening to her, at all.

SECOND MAIDEN.

Does it feel good to be a bride, Meta dear?

A RELATIVE.

[She whispers her comment to a woman beside her.]

Do you know, Peshe, somehow or other this wedding here isn't at all to my taste.

SECOND RELATIVE.

Do you refer to the merchants?

FIRST RELATIVE.

They look too much alike.

SECOND RELATIVE.

I'm afraid to say what I think. The abandoned inn was torn down today. Perhaps we ought to take Khyenne aside and tell her.

FIRST RELATIVE.

Disturb the whole feast? I don't know. How can we do it?

[The merchant who left some time before returns with bundles of merchandise. The crowd stirs. The two women who have just been speaking withdraw to their places and exchange whispers as they watch the proceedings. The merchant lays the wares on the table near the bridal couple. The crowd and the couple are quite bewildered. He begins to undo the packages.]

VOICES.

Did you ever see such linen! Snow white.
And as fine as gossamer.
You can make at least ten excellent shirts from it.
Maybe more than ten.

FIRST WOMAN.

You can make tablecloths out of it.

VOICES.

Look at that!

Goodness me! What a dress can be made from that!

Such wonderful colors!

Silver flower designs.

Fit for a queen.

How can a person sew on such stuff?

How can you cut it?

And the shawl — of Turkish silk!

A curtain for the Holy Ark.

See how it sticks to the hands.

And look at that porcelain!

And those flowers! Look!

A MERCHANT.

This is all of the best, the most costly. Let people know what sort of merchants once passed this way.

SECOND MERCHANT.

Let people remember that once upon a time merchants rode this way to a fair, and that they gave wedding presents.

[He unpacks some bundles.]

VOICES.

What glasses!

Crystal!

With the word "Passover" inscribed on them.

Golden rims.

It's a sin to use them.

How does a person drink out of such glasses?

*[The presents are placed upon the table, which
they cover completely.]*

A MERCHANT.

And on top of all this I'll give a twenty-fiver.

SECOND MERCHANT.

And I, fifty in cash.

BENDET.

[Deeply moved, to the merchants.]

My dear friends, you simply must remain here over Saturday. We'll make merry and dance till Saturday. I have only one daughter. We'll make merry and dance right through the Sabbath. What do you say, gentlemen?

[The merchants laughingly consent.]

ITSIK.

[Who has all this time been standing aloof, near a window, not taking part in any of the conversation. To the crowd.]

Well, enough of wedding gifts, now. Let the gentlemen play and dance for us some more.

BENDET.

Dance and play! Play and dance! Isn't that so, Eisik? I myself will dance with the guests.

EISIK.

The merchants will dance with the couple. Make room.

BENDET.

Yes, the merchants will dance with the couple.

FIRST MERCHANT.

We'll play and dance.

SECOND MERCHANT.

All of us. Get ready.

THIRD MERCHANT.

Join hands in a circle.

FOURTH MERCHANT.

Let one wheel dance inside the other! In a circle!

[Four of the merchants begin to play and soon themselves execute a Jewish dance in time to the tune. They are followed by the whole crowd. The dancing becomes faster and wilder; gradually a hush envelops the room, broken only by the magic whirl of the dancers and musicians. They clasp hands more and more tightly. No one notices that Itsik and Meta are now dancing together, and that as they dance they draw nearer and nearer to the door, through which both disappear into the night.]

A WOMAN.

[Crying out.]

Where is the bride?

[Suddenly the crowd ceases to dance. For a moment all are petrified. They look about in amazement.]

BENDET.

[He is the first to realize what has happened. Cries out.]

Aha!

[Dashes to the door.]

CURTAIN

ACT THREE

SCENE: *A deep blue night, out of which looms a sandy road. To the right, at the side of the road, lies the lumber of a structure that has been taken apart. Not far from the pile of wood burns a campfire, which is about to go out; from time to time, however, it flares up, revealing the landscape clearly — the fields in the distance, heaped up with produce. Here and there stands out the silhouette of a tree. From afar come the shouts of persons in the fields, as if one is calling to the other. The cries come nearer.*

A WOMAN'S VOICE.

Don't go there. Can't you see that nobody's there?

A MAN'S VOICE.

I'm not afraid. I've seen stranger things than this in my life. [*Shouting.*] Is anybody there?

A WOMAN'S VOICE.

Somebody's lighted a fire. Don't go there. Don't.

A RELATIVE.

[*Enters.*]

Somebody lighted a fire here. It looks as if there was a wagon here not very long ago. Come on. Don't be afraid.

A WOMAN'S VOICE.

Hush, hush! It seems to me that somebody's coming. I hear Bendet's voice.

A RELATIVE.

Call him over. It isn't right for him to be wandering alone.

A WOMAN.

He is not alone. Just listen.

A RELATIVE.

Bendet! Ben-det!

A MAN'S VOICE.

[From a distance.]

Who is there?

A RELATIVE.

[Enters.]

See, there's a campfire here. Who is there? Your wife?

FIRST RELATIVE.

What a night — what a night. The little brandy that I drank has long since evaporated.

SECOND RELATIVE.

We ought to drag Bendet back to the house by force.

FIRST RELATIVE.

It seems to me that I heard his voice only a moment ago —.

A WOMAN'S VOICE.

Yes, so did I. Hush, hush.

FIRST RELATIVE.

Bendet, Khyenne! They don't answer. There were some harnessed horses waiting for them. And they left at once.

SECOND RELATIVE.

Together with the merchants.

FIRST RELATIVE.

It was a pre-arranged affair. Bendet! Ben-det!

SECOND RELATIVE.

We ought to put out the fire. [*Inspects the ground.*] There, see. There were a couple of horses here. I can make out their tracks. And it was a heavy load they pulled.

FIRST RELATIVE.

Let's follow the tracks.

A WOMAN'S VOICE.

Don't do it. Don't.

FIRST RELATIVE.

Then let's hunt up Bendet and take him back to the house. He'll exhaust himself in the search.

A WOMAN'S VOICE.

That's the best thing to do. That's most advisable.

SECOND RELATIVE.

He was filled to the gills with whisky. Perhaps he fell into some ditch.

FIRST RELATIVE.

Maybe he fell into the lake altogether.

SECOND RELATIVE.

Oh, if I only caught one of them. I'd beat him to death.

FIRST RELATIVE.

Hush, silence. Some one is riding this way. Perhaps it's the merchants.

SECOND RELATIVE.

They're coming from the other direction. Let's go and catch up with them.

The Haunted Inn

FIRST RELATIVE.

First I'll find a good switch.

A WOMAN'S VOICE.

Come along. Leave that place.

SECOND RELATIVE.

Some one's riding there. Do you hear the horses snorting?

[He seizes a piece of wood and runs out.]

FIRST RELATIVE.

Wait for me.

[He, too, seizes something from the ground and disappears.]

A WOMAN'S VOICE.

Where are you running? Look out, God forbid, that they don't kill you. Better come over here — I can hear Bendet's voice again, in the opposite direction. It seems to me he's crying "Help!"

[Her last words are hard to understand. She has evidently run away. Among the fields heavy steps are heard.]

ITSIK.

[Enters. He is leading Meta by the hand.]

There's no use in your running. It had to happen, and it's happened.

META.

Put out the fire.

ITSIK.

If it's to be a wedding — let it be a wedding, then. But don't play at spite with me. There, we'll sit here just like this and let them worry their heads off. Don't be afraid. The devil won't take any of them. Fine, fine. Somebody has prepared a fire for us. It looks as if wagons were here, too.— Well, why so silent? Let Leibush just show up and I'll throw him into the fire like —.

META.

[Laughs nervously.]

ITSIK.

Don't you like it? I'll bring some musicians here.

META.

What now?

ITSIK.

What now? Soon your father will be here with a crowd of people.

META.

Do you really mean it?

·ITSIK.

And we'll get into a fight with your father.

META.

I won't allow it.

ITSIK.

And we'll break your Leibush's back.

META.

What do you mean?

ITSIK.

Do you imagine you're going to get off so easily?
Do you think it's going to be so easy to play a trick
upon Itsik?

META.

I'll go home at once.

ITSIK.

You'll find nobody home now. They've all gone
hunting in the fields for us. Why don't you say
something?

META.

I'm going home.

ITSIK.

Go, if you wish. You belong to neither your father nor Leibush. You'll break your neck and then come running back to me. Wherever you'll happen to be, spirits will keep drawing you to me. They'll fetch you even through the worst storm.

META.

I'll show you that you play a very small part in my life. I hate you. I have hated you always. I was simply afraid of my father.

ITSIK.

I haven't asked you whether you love me or hate me.

META.

Leibush is better than you. Leibush couldn't talk so coarsely as you talk to me. Leibush never even so much as kissed me, while you — you laugh. You are a coarse fellow. You're a horse-dealer, and you deal with people as if they were horses. I've noticed that many a time. When you'll want to make love to me, you'll lash me with a whip. How many times have you lashed me with the whip?

ITSIK.

Too bad I haven't my whip here now. I'd show you how much I love you. Crying, are you? Stand by the fire. Let your tears fall on the flames, and

you'll see — witches with broomsticks in their hands will leap from them.

META.

I'm not crying. My mother must be crying now. She must be tearing the hair from her head.

ITSIK.

Your father took it into his head to have a wedding without inviting his old partner. Even supposing that I had stolen a horse from his barn — what has one thing to do with the other? "Itsik," he should have said to me, "give me back my horses. Be a good fellow." And I would have spat into his foolish face. And you, if you like him so much, can go straight home. Leibush is waiting for you. He's a good boy. He won't speak an angry word to you. Go, Leibush is waiting for you. Why don't you say something? [*Embraces her.*] Tell me, why are you silent? Just as if you'd made a bargain with the devil to perform a miracle. How your eyes glitter; just like a cat's. Do you want to bite me, perhaps? Here, bite. Here's my hand — bite! And I'll twist your head off! Why were you willing to have your father trade you to Eisik?

META.

Let go of my hand.

ITSIK.

Why didn't you say anything at the engagement party?

META.

Let go of my hand.

ITSIK.

Why did you step willingly under the wedding canopy?

META.

Did I go willingly?

ITSIK.

Of course you did.

META.

Swear.

ITSIK.

[Thrusts her away from him.]

Here's my oath.

META.

No, swear that I went willingly to the wedding canopy.

[Exit Meta.]

ITSIK.

[Approaches her.]

I'll rip your clothes off and throw them into the flames.

[About to do so.]

META.

I'll bite your hands to shreds. I'll scratch your eyes out. I love Leibush. I hate you as I hate a spider. I wanted to marry him.

ITSIK.

Swear.

META.

I, swear to you?

ITSIK.

Swear.

META.

[With a sudden impulse she tears off part of her clothes and throws herself into his arms.]

Here's my oath!

ITSIK.

What are you doing, Meta?

META.

I'll tear everything off, and let the evil spirits dally with me. [*Snuggles close to him, and trembles.*] Tell me, what you want of me. What have I ever done to you?

ITSIK.

I love you.

META.

No, it's not you who love me. You yourself cannot love so passionately, you alone cannot rouse me so deeply. It's as if a thousand Itsiks were merged into one, and all loved me. As if they were all kissing me. Rending bits of flesh from me! There's a reason for that, Itsik. See where we're sitting! Perhaps the haunted inn is to blame for all this. See where we're sitting! Perhaps those merchants at the wedding weren't human beings at all! I'm afraid Itsik, afraid. My teeth are chattering. Is that you, Itsik? Maybe you're not Itsik at all! Maybe —. Tell me, why have you brought me here, to this spot, where I'll have to rot for the rest of my life? It's you. [*Kisses him.*] Those are your eyes, your face, your hands. That's the way. Press me closer to you and I'll recognize your hands. So. No, you can squeeze me harder than that. You've always had such strong arms Itsik; have pity on me. Take me back home.

ITSIK.

[*Releases her.*]

You are cold. I'll cover you. Why do you tremble so? Come, sit down nearer to the fire.

META.

Why did you bring me here?

ITSIK.

Because nobody will think of looking for us in this spot.

META.

Who were those persons that went hurrying by?

ITSIK.

They happened to be riding this way, and stopped to graze their horses.

META.

And is that all?

ITSIK.

What else did you think?

META.

Do you hear how the wood crackles in the flames?

ITSIK.

Every fire is like that.

META.

Fiery snakes are coiling about the flames.

ITSIK.

Every fire is like that.

META.

[Her head upon his bosom.]

You love me, I know it. You can't live without me. I know it. I am a very wicked girl. I never answer when I'm questioned. Or else I reply beside the point. I'm as silent as a cat and think up the most evil things. Oh, what evil things I think!

ITSIK.

I know you well. I'll tear out those cat's claws of yours yet, together with the flesh.

META.

I'm afraid of only one person in the world — and that is my father. As to my mother, I pity her —. And don't you imagine that I'm afraid of you! Well, what shall we do now?

ITSIK.

You shall be mine.

META.

No, I will never be yours. I want to belong to somebody else. Only you must kidnap me through the window every time. Just as you steal a horse out of a barn.

ITSIK.

And you refuse to be mine?

META.

I want to be far from you — so far that you may not discover what has become of me. You will go about for days and nights at a time like a madman, neither eating nor drinking. You'll drive your horses to death. They'll be bathed in foam. And when you do discover me — you'll hold me, as now, by force, before a campfire, and do with me whatsoever you please.

ITSIK.

I am not holding you by force even now.

META.

You've conspired with the evil spirits to have them make me wander over the fields tonight. [*Kisses him. Weeps.*] Itsik, I was married this evening. Only today I was standing beneath the wedding canopy. And they gave me so many presents. What did you want of me?

ITSIK.

You tell me — what do *you* want of *me*?

META.

I want you to weep, as I am weeping now.

ITSIK.

[*Bursts into laughter.*]

META.

Don't laugh so loud. We'll be overheard.

ITSIK.

Let them hear. Sooner or later they'll discover it.
[*Shouts.*] Come here! Come here! This is where we are!

META.

Hush! I'll stop your mouth for you.

ITSIK.

Come here! Come here!

META.

I don't want to.

ITSIK.

Here we are! Come here!

META.

I hate you, more than the worst of creatures.

ITSIK.

Here is Meta! Bendet, come here!

META.

[Tears her hair in fury.]

You shall not do it.

ITSIK.

I will. I will hide nothing. Once and for all. Let the whole matter be clear to everybody. I did not kidnap you, and I have nothing to conceal in the affair.

META.

[Falls to her knees before him.]

Don't do it, Itsik. I'll never survive the night. What did you wish of me? I will never be yours. Never. Oh, I'm so cold. I'll never survive this night —. You should have come with an axe and split my head, but never should you have done what you've done today to me and all the others. I have been thinking all night that perhaps you wouldn't come. Perhaps you wouldn't come.

ITSIK.

And I did come. And I'll tear out your claws.

META.

How have I deserved this?

ITSIK.

I'll tear out your eyes, those wicked eyes of yours. I'll flay your body and then I'll weep over you and kiss your flesh. [*He embraces her and kisses her passionately.*] You want to torture me. You want me to worry myself away to a shadow. You want to trample on my heart. What do you want of me? [*Tears are discerned in his words.*] I'll go mad without you. You'll turn me crazy. I'll wander over the fields in tatters like a mad dog, and everybody will throw stones at me. What do you want of me? I'll give you whatever you ask. Shall I kiss your hands? [*He kisses her hands.*] There, shall I kiss your eyes? There. Here is my heart. Take it, and gulp down my blood. Devour my flesh. Trample it beneath your heel. Here, tear out my eyes and cast them into the flames. What else would you have of me? Isn't that enough? Then I'll break my legs and have to lie forever at your feet and you may kick me aside as if I were a dog —.

META.

I'll break my legs together with you. Oh, this mad dashing about will soon enough break my legs.

ITSIK.

I'll make up with your father and then let him give you to me.

META.

We're both of us in a bad plight today.

ITSIK.

I'll make up with Leibush, too. I'll ask him to forgive me for having stolen you away from under the wedding canopy.

META.

I'm afraid.

ITSIK.

I'll do everything, just as I promise.

META.

[*Frightened.*]

I'm afraid.

ITSIK.

I'll arrange matters with everybody.

META.

I'm afraid of everything. Of you, of the fire, of the fields. Call somebody. Let them all come. It seems to me that I can hear somebody calling in the fields. Cry out to them. Let them come. Here we ^{are} are!
Come here!

ITSIK.

Don't shout.

META.

Come here! Here I am!

ITSIK.

They'll find you naked, and they'll beat you black and blue.

META.

Let them! Come here! I am afraid.

ITSIK.

[Struggles with her, trying to silence her. Her cries, however, become louder and louder.]

META.

Take me away from this place! Here we are! Come here!

ITSIK.

[Releases her.]

META.

[Recoils from him, and stands at a distance.]

I hate you. I went to the wedding canopy willingly. And I was in earnest when I told my father that I wanted Leibush for my husband.

ITSIK.

[Advances toward her.]

META.

[Venomously.]

Go away from me!

[Voices are heard in the distance.]

ITSIK.

People are approaching! Your father's coming. They're all coming this way. Your father's on horseback. Hurry, better hide yourself in the cornstalks, before they catch you.

META.

You can run away. I'm not afraid.

BENDET.

[His voice is heard from a distance.]

Who is there?

META.

It's I, father! Come here!

ITSIK.

Now we'll see. Come here, Bendet! Here's your daughter. She's dancing here with the spirits in the haunted inn!

BENDET.

[*Enters.*]

Who is here?

META.

[*Throws herself around Bendet's neck.*]

Save me, daddy, save me! I'm afraid.

BENDET.

What's happened? Good God in heaven, how does she come here?

[*Itsik stands in the shadows; Bendet cannot notice him, on account of the fire.*]

ITSIK.

[*From his place.*]

Well, Bendet, what will you say now?

BENDET.

Who is there? How does he come here?

META.

Take me away from this place, daddy. I can't get away from here myself.

BENDET.

What has happened? How do you come here? Where are your clothes? Your wedding clothes? What is he doing here? What is he doing here?

ITSIK.

You've been playing with the devil, Bendet.

BENDET.

It was you who kidnapped my daughter and brought her here. I'll tear your eyes out!

[He rushes upon Itzik.]

ITSIK.

Don't get so excited. You yourself lost your head. Such a fine person you think yourself. A match with Itzik was beneath your dignity.

BENDET.

[To Meta.]

Tell him to keep silent.

META.

Daddy dear, take me away from this place.

BENDET.

[As if he has only just noticed the fire.]

What sort of fire is this?

ITSIK.

Your daughter's burning up in this fire. Your property and wealth are being consumed in it. You yourself, you old fool, are burning in this fire!

META.

Beat him for his words, daddy! Give him a sound thrashing!

ITSIK.

Well, Bendet, come here. Your daughter has told you to.

META.

Give him a sound thrashing, daddy. He's to blame for it all, and nobody else.

BENDET.

[Rushes upon Itzik. They begin a wild struggle. Both fall to the ground, and the mute contest continues.]

The Haunted Inn

META.

Choke him, daddy. He's to blame for everything. Choke him! Throw him into the flames! That's the way. Strangle him.

[Enter Eisik, Leibush, Khyenne and some relatives.]

KHYENNE.

[Affrighted.]

Meta, Meta, in God's name!

EISIK.

Who's that rolling over the ground?

LEIBUSH.

Who has torn off her clothes?

EISIK.

Who is there? Bendet! Itsik! Come here, let's separate them. What's up? They'll strangle each other. Come here!

[The furious, silent battle continues before the fighters are separated.]

KHYENNE.

What's this? Lord above us! Bendet! What's the matter?

EISIK.

Who brought these two together here?

[Itisk and Bendet rush again at each other, but they are held well apart.]

LEIBUSH.

[To Bendet.]

How can you lower yourself to fight with such an upstart? What's come over you — ?

EISIK

In God's name, here, on this spot, with Itsik — with him — Bendet, what *has* come over you?

KHYENNE.

[Weeps over Meta.]

My child, my treasure, my gem, say something. Who has stripped you so naked? Who has ruined my joyous day?

EISIK.

[Suspectingly.]

Let us leave this place. The sooner the better.

A RELATIVE.

How do they come to this spot? Who lighted the fire here?

BENDET.

[Breathing hard.]

What has happened to me? Where am I? Eisik, come here! There's something wrong with us. Eisik! *[In fright he rushes to Eisik.]* Let's leave this place. Lead me, for I have no strength.

KHYENNE.

My child, come from this place. Come with me.

BENDET.

[Leaning against Eisik.]

I didn't know where I was. With whom was I just now fighting? Whom was I trying to strangle?

EISIK.

Come away from this place. *[He leads him.]* Come away from this place.

KHYENNE.

[Leading Meta.]

My child. My child.

[They all start to leave, but it seems as if they have fallen into a mesh and cannot unravel themselves. They move away, and yet remain upon the same spot. Itsik, however, stands in his place near the fire, secure and at ease.]

BENDET.

Where's the road that leads from this place?

LEIBUSH.

Come in this direction — to the right. Here is the way.

KHYENNE.

Don't leave me alone with my child.

EISIK.

By following this direction we'll surely strike the windmill.

KHYENNE.

Follow a straight path! A straight path! Woe is me! Woe! Somebody come here. Come here! Help!

BENDET.

Where is he? Let him show us the way.

ITSIK.

[Does not stir from his place.]

EISIK.

Leave him. Hold on firmly.

[Gradually they manage to extricate themselves and disappear. Their voices may be heard for some time. One of them cries: "To the right!" The other, "To the left!" Then, complete silence.]

ITSIK.

[Looks for a long time toward the direction in which they have disappeared. Spits into the fire.]

Fie upon the whole mess!

[Turns hurriedly and disappears into the darkness.]

CURTAIN

ACT FOUR

SCENE: *At Bendet's. The same room as in Act One. Evening. The rays of sunset enter through the window panes.*

META.

[She is sitting near the window, moodily, dressed in her week-day attire. Her hair is disheveled, and every moment she looks through the window, as if expecting someone. Spiritless and engrossed in thought, she goes into the next room.]

SHAKHNE.

[He appears in the doorway, his face turned toward the outside. Calls.]

Tsip, tsip, tsip! Tsip, tsip, tsip! They refuse to come into the house. Tsip, tsip, tsip! This way, my little chicks!

META.

[Enters from the next room. She carries in the presents that she had received from the unexpected merchant guests: silk cloths, silk handkerchiefs, gold ornaments and pearls. She begins to bedeck herself, tries a silk kerchief on her head, measures the gold chain against her neck, does the same with the cloth, to see whether it will do for a skirt.]

SHAKHNE.

[*In the doorway.*]

Tsip, tsip, tsip! Come into the house, little chicks!

META.

What do you need the chicks in the house for?

SHAKHNE.

They simply refuse to be decoyed into the kitchen. They lie down somewhere in the loft, in the stalls. Let them get used to the place under the oven.

META.

Mama will scold.

SHAKHNE.

She'll be willing. Her poor head's occupied with other things. So she can't do it herself. Tsip, tsip, tsip, my little chicks! [*He extracts a bit of bread from his pocket, makes it into crumbs, and scatters it upon the threshold, calling.*] The rooster, devil take him, picks up all the crumbs himself and doesn't let the hens get near them. Away with you! To the deuce with you! Tsip, tsip, my little chickens! Everything has been forgotten, and left topsy-turvy. A whole barn full of horses, and nobody gives them the slightest attention. Tsip, tsip, tsip. Here my little chicks!

META.

You're scattering crumbs upon the threshold —
you mustn't!

SHAKHNE.

No harm; the hens will gobble them up. [*He notices the ornaments upon Meta.*] What are you doing, my child? You mustn't. Throw it away! Hide it.

META.

Isn't it handsome?

SHAKHNE.

It's not right. Take it off. Nobody knows yet what took place the other night. Perhaps God will favor us. The roof was put on today. Let the evil spirits go back to their rest.

META.

Do you believe, too, that evil spirits were at the wedding?

SHAKHNE.

Don't mention a word of it. Sh! Not a word. We'll have to burn everything they left here.

META.

They were merchants. Itsik knows them.

SHAKHNE.

Don't mention their name — do you hear what I am telling you? The scoundrel! Don't mention his name, either. Take a kerchief and cover your head. You mustn't go around like that. As soon as your father comes we'll harness some horses and drive over to Eisik's.

META.

[Laughs to herself.]

SHAKHNE.

[Looks at her and shakes his head in a worried manner.]

Do you know where your father went?

META.

I don't know.

SHAKHNE.

Or where your mother went?

META.

I don't know.

SHAKHNE.

A home has been ruined. Such a celebration spoiled — and yet you know nothing. Cover your head, my child! Do you hear what I am telling you?

META.

But it's a wedding present.

SHAKHNE.

If your father were here now, he'd beat you black and blue.

META.

He would not.

SHAKHNE.

[More softly.]

When your grandpa tells you to do something you ought to obey him. Do as I say, my child, and take it off. Who knows whence that has come, and who those merchants were? They came as if the wind had brought them. With fiddles, with flutes, with drums. The devil alone can say where they disappeared. Better light the lamp, my child, and let there be a little light in the house.

META.

I don't want to smear my hands with soot.

SHAKHNE.

[Eyes her suspiciously.]

What else?

META.

I don't want to smear my hands with soot.

SHAKHNE.

What do you mean by that? I'm afraid to be left alone with you. *[He begins to split wood.]* We'll have to drive that out of you. There are plenty of ways to do it.

[He starts a fire in the fireplace. The room is bathed in a red glow.]

META.

[Parades up and down the room, attired in her finery, as if awaiting somebody.]

SHAKHNE.

Go away from me! Get into the next room!

[It is evident that he fears to be alone with her.]

META.

[Strolls to the door of the next room, and is about to enter it when she takes sudden fright. She springs backward with a scream and loses part of the finery.]

SHAKHNE.

What's the matter?

[Lacks courage to approach the door.]

META.

Who is there in the next room? *[Cries into the door of the room]* Who is there?

[She stands at a distance, pale. The grandfather, too, stands at a distance, in fright, and looks now at Meta and now at the door to the other room.]

META.

Go, grandpa. See. What's there?

SHAKHNE.

Whom did you see there?

META.

Who is there?

SHAKHNE.

Why did you cry out?

META.

You're an old, pious Jew. Why are you afraid to go in?

SHAKHNE.

I don't hear anything.

[Enter Eisik and Khyenne. For a moment, seeing Shakhne and Meta in fright, they pause in surprise.]

KHYENNE.

What has happened?

EISIK.

Something else now. This house of yours is enough to turn anybody crazy. Everything in your place has gone topsy turvy.

META.

[Nestles against her mother.]

KHYENNE.

In God's name, why have you put on those things? What have you put on? woe is me, woe!

[Carefully she removes the jewelry from Meta and places it in her apron.]

EISIK.

What's the matter here now? Why do you stand there so silent, Reb Shakhne?

SHAKHNE.

I wanted to get the hens into the house, but I couldn't fool them, no matter what I did. The rooster, devil take him, gobbled up all the crumbs. I don't know where they've gone to.

EISIK.

[Shrugs his shoulders.]

Well, what has this got to do with the hens? As truly as you see me, I'm an elderly person, but I'm beginning to be afraid of your house. Where is Bendet?

KHYENNE.

He rode into the city for advice. And to ask whether anybody has heard or seen anything of the merchants. Maybe somebody saw them drive by.

EISIK.

Then she should have been taken along.

META.

Who?

EISIK.

Yes, I mean you. You should have ridden to the city with your father. What have you put on anyway? Here you see your father and mother going about crazed with worry, and you —. Why don't

you inquire after Leibush? You don't ask how he's getting along. He sent me to inquire after you — and I find you bedecking yourself in the devil knows what —.

KHYENNE.

[Arranges the jewelry carefully in her apron and rolls it up.]

SHAKHNE.

Go see what that can be in the next room.

KHYENNE.

Light the lamp. Why do you let the wood smoke so? The deuce!

META.

[Goes to the window, sits down, and utters not a sound.]

KHYENNE.

[Lights a candle.]

What was it they saw there?

EISIK.

Come, Khyenne. You, too, Reb Shakhne. Let's really see what scares folks so.

[Very carefully, and bearing a candle, they enter the room.]

META.

[Gazes toward the door, evidently in anxious waiting. From the other room is suddenly heard the cackling of a hen eluding pursuit. Meta opens her eyes wide with surprise.]

KHYENNE.

[Enters, carrying a black hen.]

They're crazy. It was the black hen. The window was open, so she jumped in. She was sitting on the bed.

[She looks the hen over suspiciously.]

EISIK.

Do you recognize her? Is that really your hen?

KHYENNE.

The Lord bless you! Don't you think I know my own hen? She's always in the barn with the cattle, and today — they called her — the old fool! Why did you call the hens into the house, father-in-law? Who told you to do that?

EISIK.

A fine hen. As heavy as a stone. That's one from last year's brood, isn't it?

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KHYENNE.

I must go right to the barn and see whether the black hen is there. [*To Meta.*] Why do you stare so? Can't you see it's our black hen? Don't you recognize her? Come into the barn with me, father-in-law, and you'll see that the black hen isn't there.

[*Hands Eisik the hen, and she goes out, followed by Shakhne, who carries a lighted candle.*]

EISIK.

[*Holding the hen in his hand.*]

I've come to take you home with me. Leibush wanted to ride along too, but I thought it would be better for me to come alone and see how things stood. Do you hear what I'm saying to you?

META.

I don't want to go.

EISIK.

Leibush will treat you like a queen.

META.

I don't want to go to your house.

EISIK.

[*Harshly.*]

Do you realize that you were joined in wedlock to him under the marriage canopy? You are his wife.

META.

[Indifferently.]

I don't love him.

EISIK.

Nobody's asking you whether you love him or not.

[Eyes the hen which is still in his hand, suspiciously.]

Better do as you're told.

META.

I will not go home with you.

EISIK.

You won't have to live in that inn. It'll be burned down at once. It has been put back on its original site. Let it rot there. I'll give you and Leibush half of my home.

META.

I don't care to go home with you.

EISIK.

They've even kalsomined the walls there already.

META.

I don't love him.

EISIK.

You ought to see what oaken beds have been made for you. Tell me, why don't you love him? Are you still thinking of Itsik? It's too late now. Why should you care for him? He's nothing but a thief. Why, he has ruined your father. [*Suddenly.*] I and your father will tie you hand and foot and take you away by force, do you hear? Do you realize that you're a Jewish daughter? You'll be excommunicated! How dare you go about with a bare head? All this mad confusion is your fault. You'll drive your father and mother insane yet. Why don't you say something? So you don't care even to answer me? As far as I'm concerned, you don't count at all. Let your father do what he pleases with you. You're his daughter. You'll be granted a divorce, and an end to the whole mess. Well, why don't you say something now? I must bring Leibush an answer. What shall I tell him?

META.

Tell him that I will not come to him.

EISIK.

And you really think that you'll have your own way? Not so easily. [*To the hen.*] To the devil with you! What have they put this hen into my hands for, anyway?

META.

Tell Leibush to come himself. Then I'll talk with him.

KHIYENNE AND SHAKHNE.

[*Enter.*]

SHAKHNE.

The black hen's sitting there, it seems.

KHIYENNE.

The devil alone can tell. In the darkness all the hens look black.

EISIK.

Isn't she there?

KHIYENNE.

[*Takes the hen from Eisik.*]

What is there to be afraid of, anyway?

EISIK.

How still it is.

KHIYENNE.

I'll throw her under the oven. [*She does so.*] An end to it all. I'll go crazy. Everything has fallen

upon my head. Well, they've rebuilt the inn on the same site it first had. May it be a sacrifice that shall redeem all our sins. First they took it down, now they rebuild it — let there be an end to this business! My child, Eisik has come to take you home with him.

EISIK.

I've been talking to her, but she doesn't even care to answer. I tell her that they've kalsomined the other half of our home for her, and set up a couple of oaken beds. But she says — I don't know what she says. She's your daughter, after all — shall I worry myself over her? Neither will my son bury himself alive for grief.

KHYENNE.

My child. Give heed to what's being told you. I'm stronger than iron if I survive this. How have I deserved it? [*Through tears.*] For whose sin? Speak a word. I ask you in all kindness — what do you want of me?

EISIK.

She says that she doesn't love Leibush.

SHAKHNE.

And I say it should never have been permitted. Eisik is to blame. First she gave Itsik her word that she would take him, and told nobody. And now there's trouble.

EISIK.

Nobody's asking her whether she gave her word or not. What has she to say about it, anyway?

META.

Yes, I gave my word. Papa gave his word, too, but afterward he changed his mind.

EISIK.

[Beside himself.]

May your own heads ache with the worry and grief you've brought upon me and my son.

KHYENNE.

[Likewise loses control of her temper and cries out.]

Who asked you to come here that time and bother our heads about the inn? Who asked you to come and buy it? It stood there idle, and it shouldn't have worried anybody. Who asked you to interfere? We should first have ridden to the city. We should have talked it over with folks and seen whether we ought to do it. What did you want of me? I was afraid of the whole affair. I kept crying that I was afraid. My child already had a sweet-heart, and along came you to turn Bendet's head.

The Haunted Inn

EISIK.

Your Bendet could turn the heads of a thousand more like me and my son. Did you ever hear the like? I, turn Bendet's head!

KHYENNE.

Bendet doesn't know where in the world he is. The inn here, the inn there. Nothing but talk of the inn. Why, he stood there trembling like a leaf, waiting for the inn to be rebuilt upon the old site as soon as possible, and here he's ridden off at a gallop, whipping the horses like mad, to see whether he can't catch the merchants somewhere. He's all upset. He doesn't know what he's about himself. And for all this, you're to blame.

EISIK.

Then she can be given a divorce.

KHYENNE.

[*Crying.*]

May the curse descend upon your own head! What have they against my child? What do they want of my one and only child? Such a joyous soul she was! Why have they all befallen me?

SHAKHNE.

Enough. Let that be enough.

KHYENNE.

Why did they fight that night? Nearly strangled each other to death. Why did you urge Bendet to attack him? He'll divorce my daughter, he says. I scorn you! I don't care to know you.

SHAKHNE.

Consider what you're saying, Khyenne.

EISIK.

I'm beginning to feel scared. Is this Khyenne? I never heard her talk like that. Khyenne — and such a tongue! I can't believe my own ears. Why need I have added such a burden of sorrows to my load? From the very first day that I joined the family it's as if I had fallen into the hands of evil spirits. I'm trembling all over.

KHYENNE.

What did you have against my child? What?

BENDET.

[Bursts into the room and notices nobody. He carries a bundle of straw. He stuffs the straw into the oven and lights it. Cries to the bystanders.]

Hurry, place wood into the oven! What are you standing there for, like graven images? Help me start a fire! More wood into the oven!

[Hurries outside.]

KHYENNE AND SHAKHNE.

[They obey Bendet's orders. They busy themselves at the oven as if under an enchantment. They heap up dry bits of wood that they find at hand, and forget altogether the conversation that was going on when Bendet came in.]

META.

[Remains in her place, utterly indifferent to the proceedings.]

EISIK.

My hair is standing on end. No, we must put a fi nish to all this.

[Leaves hastily, slamming the door.]

KHYENNE.

[She has not noticed Eisik's departure. To Meta.]

Why are you so silent, Meta? Fetch more kindling wood. Quick. Bring in more straw.

[She adds plenty of fuel to the flames.]

BENDET.

[Comes running in, carrying the entire harness of a pair of horses: two collars, reins, a whip. He begins to pack everything into the oven. Shouts.]

Come to my aid. What are you standing there for, like graven images? Help me put all this into the oven. Confound it all, the collars can't get in. Fetch me an axe. Bring an axe! Hurry, an axe! Why don't you move? Meta, give me the axe, I say! *[They give him an axe, and with wild efforts he begins to chop the collars into pieces, stuffing them into the oven. Shouts.]* Put more straw on top! That's it. Now, more wood. There are some dry sticks on the oven. Give them to me. That's the way! Nobody must know what's burning in this oven.

[He trembles with excitement. Looks into the oven to see how the fire's progressing. Sweat pours down his face.]

KHYENNE.

[Comes to herself, turning to Bendet.]

Tell me, what has happened?

BENDET.

[Opens the window and looks out toward the servants.]

Can't you hear anything? Can't you see anybody riding this way?

SHAKHINE.

What do you mean by burning such things?

BENDET.

[Hurries to the oven, watches the flames, and then hastens back to the window.]

Now I'm no longer afraid. Let them come.

KHYENNE.

But what has happened?

BENDET.

What has happened? We might have been ruined. There must be at least thirty Gentile peasants rushing here to look for those horses. They found out that those horses were in my barn. Somebody has informed against me. There must be about thirty of them, with shovels on their shoulders, making for this place. See if it's burning. Let not a trace of the stuff remain. That was the harness of those horses.

KHYENNE.

[Spits out three times.]

Confound it all. I'm scared to death. I almost died of terror. I'm exhausted. Oh, I'm utterly exhausted.

BENDET.

[Looks through the window.]

SHAKHNE.

What do you see there?

KHYENNE.

Why, you yourself *bought* those horses! Bought them, woe is me. Can't you remember, Bendet? You yourself paid for them. What is the matter with you? Why did you burn such good harness? What were you dreaming about? What do you say, father-in-law, to such a misfortune? Those are the horses that you yourself bought and paid for at the fair.

SHAKHNE.

Really, it seems they are the selfsame horses.

BENDET.

[He is silent, his head lowered. He seems to be considering whether they are really the horses he bought.]

KHYENNE.

You must have lost your mind. *[She looks into the oven and cries.]* Burned! Such valuable articles. Burned, with your own hands. The peasants were

simply returning from their work in the fields. They're digging a trench near the woods. You yourself have seen them digging there.

BENDET.

If that's the case, then I understand it all. Now I am beginning to understand what's happened here. [*He goes over to the oven, watches the flames and shakes his head.*] Now I begin to understand everything. They're after me. I won't get off so easily. I broke up "their" nest there. I threw down the inn. Well, I've had the place rebuilt. What a wedding celebration they made for me, and what a wealth of wedding presents. Fine wedding presents they brought me. [*Suddenly seizes Shakhne by the hand.*] Come with me, daddy, I'll put you on a horse. Come with me.

KHYENNE.

[*Frightened.*]

What are you going to do?

BENDET.

Come, dad! Come along with me!

[*The old man has hardly time to move before he is seized by Bendet and pulled out.*]

KHYENNE.

Where, Bendet? Where are you taking him?
Looks through the window.] My child, where have they gone? Good God in heaven, what curse has descended upon our home? Look, he's putting grandpa on the horse. Oh my! He'll fall! See! He's taken a whole bundle of straw along! How they galloped away! [*She returns from the window.*] Where can Eisik be? Where is he? Nobody noticed where he disappeared. He realized that we had met with a misfortune, so he ran away. Too bad! I'd have drenched him in boiling water. Why have they betaken themselves to me? What do they want of my child? Meta darling, my treasure, my life, come to me; my soul, dearie, apple of my eye, come to me.

META.

[Rushes to her mother's arms.]

KHYENNE.

[Kisses her.]

My darling, I won't be able to bear it. There's nobody home now. Tell me, what happened to you on that terrible night?

META.

[Kisses her mother.]

I don't know at all what happened to me. I only know one thing; that I can't live without Itsik.

KHYENNE.

What did he ask of you that night?

META.

He said that he'd never let anybody else have me. He stood right beside me under the wedding canopy. He is my husband, he said.

KHYENNE.

What shall I do? Where shall I go? The whole house has been turned topsy turvy. I don't know myself. I don't recognize Bendet. I can't recognize my own right hand. Whom can I go to for advice?

META.

Even if you tie me hand and foot, I'll tear the rope and fly to Itsik. I'll fall before his feet and let him trample upon me. I can't live without him. Maybe he's cast a spell over me. But I must fly to him. This very night I'll run away from home. Even if you watch me, I'm no longer afraid of anybody now. I have nothing to lose. I'm not afraid of father, either. I won't obey him any more. I can see that he himself is sorry for what he's done. I see it well.

[*A bell is heard just outside the window.*]

META.

Itsik! He has come!

KHYENNE.

Call him in, my child.

META.

Itsik, Itsik. Come here, quickly!

ITSIK.

[Enters.]

META.

[Falls upon his neck.]

KHYENNE.

[Crying.]

Good angels brought you here. God Himself brought you to us.

ITSIK.

What's the trouble, Meta?

META.

[With bated breath.]

Take me away from here.

KHYENNE.

We are most unfortunate.

ITSIK.

You look it.

KHYENNE.

We are at the end of our powers. Oh, we are utterly exhausted!

META.

[Kissing his hands.]

Take me away from here. Right away, before father comes home. Mama, tell him to take me away from here, or I'll die.

ITSIK.

[Notices the various jewels about the room.]

Silks, jewelry — all strewn about the house.

KHYENNE.

[As if beholding them for the first time.]

They are the cause of my misfortune.

ITSIK.

Where is Bendet? I have brought him back his horse. He came riding over to us the other night, and left the horse behind. If I hadn't taken charge of him, he would certainly have got lost. *[To Meta, who nestles close to him.]* Your father wanted to play with the devil, and he took Eisik and that son of his as partners. And you, my fine article, should have said to such a father: I am no horse and you needn't think you can sell me!

KHYENNE.

What shall I do? He never listens to what I say.
[*As if just recalling that Bendet and Shakhne have gone away.*] Yes, Bendet and the old fellow. Please, Itsik, like a good boy, find out where they ran to. Go, mount a horse and find out where they are.

ITSIK.

Where shall I go?

KHYENNE.

They rode off somewhere at a gallop. He seized the old man like a lunatic. Go, my good boy.

META.

Don't go. Don't go.

ITSIK.

Come. Let's all ride off in search of them. You can jump into my carriage. In what direction did they ride away?

KHYENNE.

I don't know.

ITSIK.

What direction did they take, Meta?

META.

I don't know.

ITSIK.

I'm not going on a wild goose chase.

*[Through the windows is reflected a ruddy glow,
as if a conflagration has broken out in the
vicinity.]*

META.

[She is the first to notice it and raises an alarm.]

Look, look, look!

ITSIK.

There's a fire near by.

META.

They've set fire to the haunted inn!

KHYENNE.

They must have gone crazy!

META.

[Rushes to the window.]

They themselves set fire to the inn.

KHYENNE.

Let's run over. Hurry!

ITSIK.

[Holding Khyenne back.]

Where will you run? There's nothing for you to run about.

KHYENNE.

We're ruined. Too late. Too late.

META.

[In the excitement of her glee she fairly tears the hair from her head.]

It's father! Only he, and nobody else, could have done it!

KHYENNE.

Itsik, have pity. Run over to them. I'll never survive this blow.

META.

[Seizes him by both hands.]

Don't leave me alone. Somebody's riding this way. I can hear him coming. *[Runs to the window.]* He'll be here right away!

[All look toward the door expectantly.]

BENDET.

[*Enters. He is pale and disheveled. His mouth foams. He sinks almost helplessly into the first place he finds. He whispers something inaudible.*]

META.

Daddy! Daddy dear —!

[*Kisses him.*]

BENDET.

[*Does not notice Itsik.*]

It's all over. Let there be an end to it. [*As if gasping for breath.*] Let everything go up in flames —. Close the window, so that I can't see the fire. They chased me right to the door. Oh, how it leaped into flames!

ITSIK.

[*Very tactfully.*]

What is the trouble, uncle?

BENDET.

You, here! [*About to throw himself upon the youth, but he sinks weakly back to his place.*] What is he doing here? Khyenne, Meta, how does he come here?

KHYENNE.

Bendet, in God's name, consider what you're doing. See what you've brought upon yourself.

[Weeps.]

ITSIK.

What have you against me, uncle? What harm did I ever do you? You've brought this all upon yourself.

BENDET.

How does he come here?

META.

Daddy dear! Daddy dear, have pity upon me!

KHYENNE.

[Pleading, in despair.]

Bendet, for God's sake consider what you're doing. What have you taken into your head? Come to your senses, Bendet.

BENDET.

Give me straw, fire! I want to set fire to everything.

[He dashes to the oven and tries to seize a burning brand from the flames. They hold him back.]

SHAKHNE.

[*Enters, exhausted, frightened, barely alive.*]

What a crazy notion! He drags me I don't know where. The idea of setting fire to such a building. It's burning like tinder.

BENDET.

[*Manages to gasp.*]

Father, set fire to the house, too. Let's leave this place. Let everything go up in flames. Let's save ourselves. Set fire to the place, father, I haven't the strength left for it. We've burned "their" nest there and now they'll come to fill my house. They are coming here. They're coming.

ITSIK.

Uncle, I've brought back the horse that you forgot in the fields that night.

BENDET.

What horse?

ITSIK.

On the wedding night.

BENDET.

What wedding night?

KHIYENNE.

Woe is me, he has forgotten everything.

ITSIK.

When the merchants came here.

BENDET.

[Stops his ears.]

Oh, I can't hear!

SHAKHNE.

Since the world was created nothing like this ever happened.

BENDET

[Arises and tries to walk, but can only stagger, as if he has lost his strength. They lead him into the next room.]

KHIYENNE.

[Follows him, crying.]

Bendet, my darling, what ails you?

[The ruddy glow seen through the window pales down.]

SHAKHNE AND META.

[They assist Bendet into the next room.]

ITSIK.

[He is left by himself.]

META.

[Comes running in to Itsik and throws herself about his neck. She kisses his hands like a submissive animal. Her voice trembles.]

What have you done to us? You're a murderer. You've ruined us all. You're a scoundrel. You have no pity.

[From the next room comes of a sudden the sounds of a mute struggle, and soon after, the noise of shattered panes. A red glow shows through the door and flames appear. For a while the cries of Khyenne and Shakhne are heard, but soon the shattering of glass sounds again, showing that persons are jumping through the windows. The flames dart from the next room, smoke issues and it is evident that the fire is consuming everything.]

META.

[Jumps about in wild confusion. Tries to dash into the next room.]

ITSIK.

[Holds her tightly to him.]

Where are you running? They jumped through the windows into the street.

META.

[Struggling with him.]

Let me jump into the flames!

ITSIK.

Now you'll never run away from me again.

[He carries her from the burning house as if she were but a feather.]

CURTAIN

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